俺の彼女と幼なじみが修羅場すぎる

裕時悠示・

イラスト るろお

GA文庫

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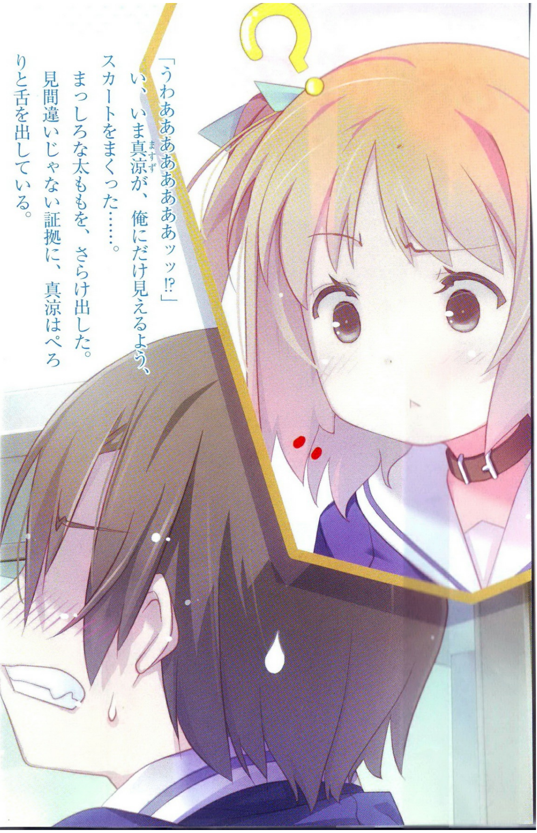
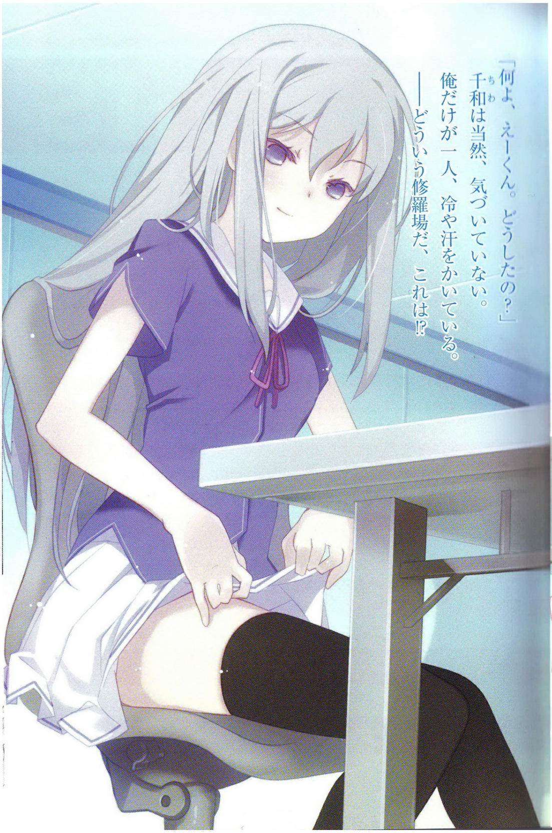


「うわああああああああッッ⁉」
い、いま真涼（ますず）が、俺にだけ見えるよう、
スカートをまくった……。
まっしろな太ももを、さらけ出した。
見間違いじゃない証拠に、真涼はぺろりと舌を出している。



「何よ、えーくん。どうしたの？」
千和（ちわ）は当然、気づいていない。
俺だけが一人、冷や汗をかいている。
——どういう修羅場だ、これは⁉

春咲千和
Chiwa Harusaki
150cm／45kg
Favorite：KENDO

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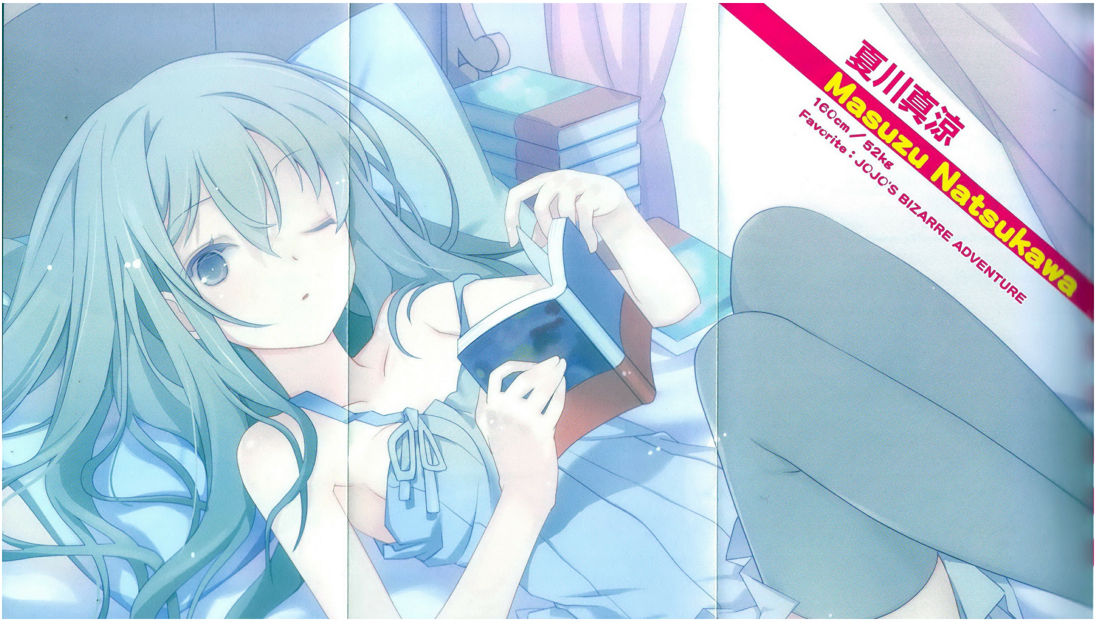

夏川真涼
Masuzu Natsukawa
160cm / 52kg
Favorite : JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE

#0: Childhood Friend's Confession Mayhem

Pre-Chapter Extra

`Flowers In Both Hands:`

`For example, getting hold of two great things at the same time.`

`Also refers to a man getting hold of two girls at the same time.`

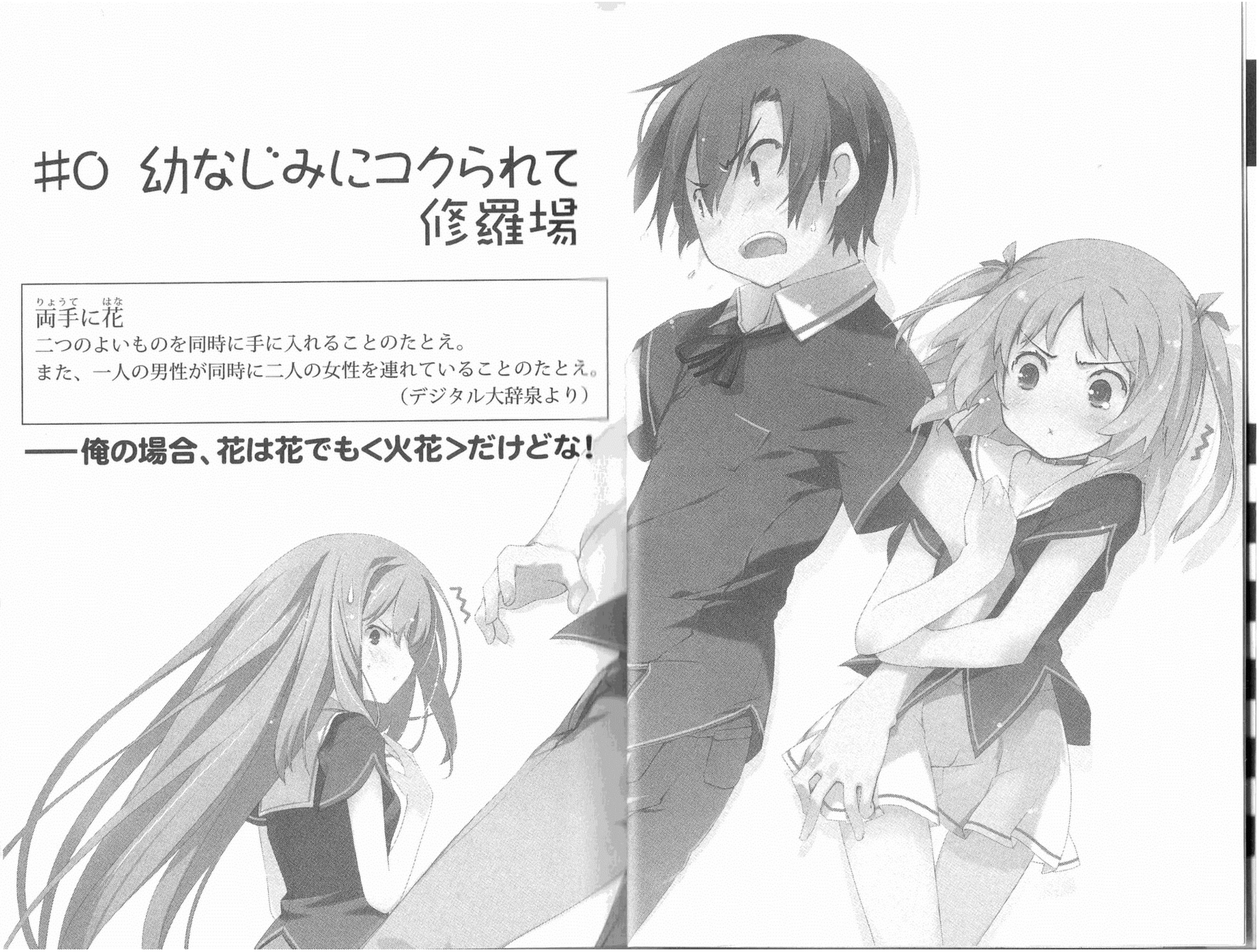
`(From the Digital Daijisen)`

——In my case, even though they are flowers, they are more like flower sparks![1]

#0 幼なじみにコクられて修羅場

両手に花
二つのよいものを同時に手に入れることのたとえ。
また、一人の男性が同時に二人の女性を連れていることのたとえ。
（デジタル大辞泉より）

——俺の場合、花は花でも<火花>だけどな！



Chapter

It was during the afterschool hours in early June, right after the seasonal change of clothing.

I was standing on the rooftop of the darkening school premise.

Before me was a girl in the same grade as me.

Harusaki Chiwa.

I've been hanging out with her since first grade. In other words, she's the so-called childhood friend.

High school year one. Age 15.

Her short stature only reached up to my shoulders. Two flicks of long hair on both sides were fastened with ribbons, which made it resemble the ears of a dog. Her big, round eyes were, for some reason, innocent-looking like those of a puppy. Her skirt, with some evidence of it still being new remaining, fluttered in the wind.

Tiny.

Cute.

But, *deplorable*.

First, her eyes were deplorable.

Attached to an inverse triangular shape, they were bloodshot. It seemed like she could kill with her gaze. Those upturned eyes were glaring at me, as I stood facing her.

Also, the air around her was deplorable.

Her veins were showing on her temples. 'Haah, haah', she panted like a beast. Her violent aura was as much as to say, 'I just stabbed a person. It won't make a difference if I make it two now. Aah? Nii-chan'.

No matter how I looked at it, she was too tensed up.

That tensed up Chiwa pointed her tiny finger towards me,

"I-I'm going to co-confesshyu!"

"..."

Right at the beginning this fella had stuttered.

"Even when I talk about confessing, I'm not talking about 'I actually failed!' or 'the person who ate the shortcake was me!'."

Who would actually take the trouble to call me up to the rooftop to talk about these things?

"The confession I'm talking about i-is a l-love confession."

I heaved a large sigh.

As I squinted my eyes due to the rays of the setting sun, I calmed myself.

"I got it. Let me hear your feelings."

"Y-Yesh!"

'Suuhaa, suuhaa', Chiwa took a few deep breaths.

"...Can you wait for a while?"

"What now?"

"Wait for a while, just wait for a while."

Chiwa went to the entrance of the rooftop to retrieve the belongings she had left there.

What she took out from the leather bag, was a Shinai[2].

By the way, Chiwa was not a member of the Kendo[3] Club. While she did Kendo until ninth grade, she didn't carry on in high school[4].

Yet, she adopted a middle-stance with the Shinai she had brought for some reason.

"Alright, I'm set!"

"No, you aren't?!"

"But, I feel calmer like this."

Indeed, her nervousness had left her.

Her expression had also become relaxed.

"Hnnnnn! Somehow, I can feel my tension swelling up! Prepare yourself!"

"Hey, isn't this a confession? A love confession, right?!"

My body sensed danger and I backed off.

"That's right, it's a confession. Ki-eeeeee!"

In a splendid manner, Chiwa shuffled her feet forward and closed in.

"W-Wait, wait! What kind of girl would brandish a Shinai while confessing?!"

"Don't sweat it. Even my sensei from before once said, 'don't fuss too much over the form'."

Of course I would fuss over it! It's my life here!

"B-but, didn't you give up on the sword? Aren't you going to walk the path of romance? Didn't you say that you wanted to have a love life like those in shoujo manga[5]?!"

I desperately tried to persuade her.

To think that a love confession could be this dangerous...

"...I got it."

Chiwa lowered her Shinai.

"Sorry. Let's redo it. I'll get it right this time."

Chiwa stiffened herself and looked up at me.

Her black eyes were gooey-looking like those of a puppy.

Her soft-looking hair fluttered in the wind.

Her small hands grasped her skirt and then released it nervously.

...Uhn, high quality indeed.

From her appearance, it was quite unbelievable that she had no boyfriend up until now.

"Erm, hey. Ei-kun[6]..."

Ei-kun.

That's how Chiwa addresses me, Kidou Eita.

'It's embarrassing, so please stop', I've told her that umpteen times, but she never did stop, even until today.

"Ei-kun, I can still remember the time when you were in fourth grade... while carrying your lunch to the classroom, you fell and got smeared with curry, and as a result, you got the nickname 'Careless Indian'."

"...Aah."

Hahaha.

That was a good old 'story that was still funny today' to bring up between the two of us.

"I know that in fifth grade, when you couldn't hold it in any longer, you dashed into the women's toilet, and consequently, for the entire second term, you were called 'Women's Toilet Overdrive'."

"Gufu..."

I clutched my stomach and my knees buckled to the ground.

Th-That nickname... is unbecoming for a joke you know, Chiwa.

"And during summer vacation in sixth grade, you hid the pornbook, 'Doppyun Serenade'[7], which you picked up from under the bridge, in a puppy's kennel."

"Please stoooooooooop! I beg you, forgive meeeeeeeeeee!"

I'm already.

I'm already on the verge of tears.

Dug up.

My dark history has been dug up...

"I really love the Ei-kun who did all this."

"Stop lying?!"

What kind of maniac hobbies do you have?

With a seemingly perplexed look, Chiwa said,

"What do you mean by lying? I really..."

"What are you planning to do by exposing my past? Is there a confession that deals out such a blow of mental damage?"

"But the manga said that this would go well! 'This fella can actually remember all these things to such an extent'!, 'Because, I've been always watching you ☆', it said."

No...

While I don't know the contents of that manga, words like 'women's toilet' and 'Doppyun Serenade' shouldn't appear in it.

"Anyway, it's a love confession, right? You should be praising my strengths, right? Such as, 'You're always studying earnestly'. Or like 'You scored the highest in the recent mid-terms'."

Hm, Chiwa folded her arms and looked away.

"Because that's all boring."

"What do you mean by boring! Isn't it the duty of a student to study?!"

"I preferred the idiot Ei-kun in middle school, though."

"I even took such great pains to become your practicing partner, so what's with that attitude?!"

"What's with that belittling look?! Even when you're younger than me!"

"Only by three months and ten days! How long are you going to act like a big sister, this 'Deplorable chiwawa'[8]'!"

And at that moment.

"That should be enough, both of you."

A girl stepped out from the shadow of the water tank.

Her long silver hair danced in the wind.

She gazed at us with her clear, blue eyes.

Her skin was white like powdered snow, and her lips were lustrous looking like cherries.

With foreign blood mixed in, this fairy-like beauty —if Chiwa could be considered 'ordinarily cute', then this fella could be called 'incredibly beautiful'. A princess who hogged many treasures which many girls would be unable to lay their hands on, no matter how much they wished for them.

My classmate Natsukawa Masuzu.

'Fuu', she breathed out as she tilted her head, "Is it really impossible for Eita-kun to be the practicing partner of a love confession, I wonder?"

"That's why I said that right from the beginning, didn't I?!"

—And so, well.

In short, the series of confessions just now were all a 'play'.

The conceited Chiwa who loved to act tough and has a muscle-filled brain, was now practicing for the sake of becoming a 'Super Popular' girl with a love life like those found in shoujo manga. Training. Learning through an experience.

And I was pulled into the role of the partner for this special training arranged by Masuzu.

If I am going into the details of how things had gotten so complicated bit by bit—

"What a shame, Harusaki-san. Even after I went to such great lengths to lend you my boyfriend."

Masuzu winked as she clung onto my right arm.

biki, veins popped out from Chiwa's temples,

"Th-that's my bad, Natsukawa Masuzu. What's so good about Ei-kun, I *totally* don't get it!"

That's right.

It's unbelievable, but this incredibly beautiful girl, Masuzu, is my girlfriend.

...Well, she's not just *any* 'girlfriend', though.

But that's kept secret from Chiwa.

"If you can't comprehend the charm of Eita-kun, then your dream of becoming super popular will just remain a dream, you know?"

While giving a sidelong glance to Chiwa, Masuzu pressed against me even closer.

"O-oi! Don't get so close to me, it's stifling."

"You're as shy as always. I also like that about you."

This...

Don't get ahead of yourself, Masuzu.

I'll definitely not yield to the allure of a woman.

Your hair doesn't smell good!

Your breath against my ear doesn't feel ticklish!

Not to mention that your soft and squishy bulges are not tooouching my arm!

Uwah.

Oooh.

"Ei~-ku~n?"

I returned to my senses from my brief and momentary reverie.

Biting her lower lip, Chiwa glared at me with her upturned eyes.

Scary...

Who was it? Who was the one who gave this fella the nickname, 'Chiwawa'?

She's a Tosa[9] *however you look at it, right?*

"Don't you— don't you— don't you dare to make out in front of me!"

"But, we're a lovey-dovey couple. A lovey-dovey couple. A lovey-dovey couple."

Why did you say it three times?!

"Hm. It's not good to lie, Natsukawa Masuzu. Lovey-dovey? Where? Ei-kun is breaking out in cold sweat, isn't he? No matter how you look at it, he's being pressured, right?!"

"No, the main cause behind my cold sweat is the pressure of the rage you're emitting."

...But I didn't say that.

Life is precious.

"Oh. Isn't this modesty part of Eita-kuns charm? You're still a child though, so you wouldn't be able to understand."

With her eyes shining mischievously, Masuzu enthusiastically entwined her arms around mine.

Chiwa's face became increasingly more drawn.

"A-Aren't you the one with a strange preference?"

"Oh. I don't want to hear that kind of comment from a person who still likes to wear teddy bear panties even though she's already a first-year."

No, no.

The last time when Chiwa wore such panties was when she were in fourth grade, you know.

There's no way she's still wearing—

"W-W-W-W-What's wrong with that?!"

waai

She self-destructed—

"Because I like teddy bears..."

Seeing the tearful eyes of Chiwa, 'Oh dear', Masuzu began to shake her head,

"As much as you may like them, you can't attract the attention of gentlemen with them, you know?"

"I-I've never thought of attracting them with my panties! Besides, I'm not a pervert!"

"Nope. As a lady, to ensure that we are always ready when our beloved invites us to spend the night together, we must constantly have our best lingerie on us."

"In that case, teddies will do just fine! They're cute, right?!"

"That will only be forgivable if you are an elementary school student. Just as one would expect, a high school student has to battle it out with 'black'. Right? Eita-kun?"

"Eh?"

She directed that at me?

"Eita-kun, what you love is the black color that can bring out the sexiness of an adult, right?"

"Teddies are cute right? It suits me, right?"

Masuzu's smiling face, Chiwa's teary eyes; both of them sidled up to me.

I scratched my temple,

"No, if my lover was either of you, regardless of your lingerie, I would pass."

"Aah?"

"Huh?"

"...Nothing."

I kept quiet after I felt their glares fixated on me with intimidating eyes.

It's only during times like these that they're totally in sync, huh?

"Jeez Eita-kun, you're surprisingly curt today, aren't you? You should just act like always, going 'Masuzu-chan's opanchu,[10] I wonder what today's will be like. Yahoo!', while you roll around on the ground, you know?"

"I've never done anything like that before!"

"E-Ei-kun, you always do that kind of thing?!"

"Like I said, I don't!"

"The perpetrator denies it."

"Who are you calling a perpetrator?! Even as a joke, is that something you would say to your boyfriend?!"

"...I'm sorry."

Masuzu apologized meekly.

"Those wicked words were not what I truly meant. It's a bad habit I picked up —so to speak, a folly of my youth."

"What's that?"

Masuzu spoke as she lowered her eyes.

"When I was in middle school, there was a time when I aspired to be like a character from a certain manga. A beauty with a wicked tongue and an air of bewitching sexual appeal that floated around her. Wanting to become someone like that, I mimicked her mannerisms and way of speaking. And that still remains in me."

"...Hahaa. I see."

Well, it's not like I don't understand.

I also, a long time ago, had aspired to be like the nihilistic antagonist of a shounen manga[11] and had mimicked his way of speaking and rude actions. Even though I was really a squib who can't even litter.

"Therefore, there is really no deeper meaning behind my wicked words. So just let them pass without taking them too seriously, OK, Mr. Half-Price Bento[12]?"

"What's with that nickname?!"

"It means you are someone who goes for foodstuffs that are on the verge of expiring."

"Seems like there's an incredibly deep meaning to it!"

How can I let that pass without taking it seriously?

It's impossible no matter how tolerant one is...

"Ei-kun. What in the world do you like about this woman? Don't tell me you're a masochist?"

Asked Chiwa with her eyes watery.

"Well? I really... have no idea myself..."

I gazed into the distant setting sun, and I could only leave my body to the raging wind.

"It's really simple, Harusaki-san."

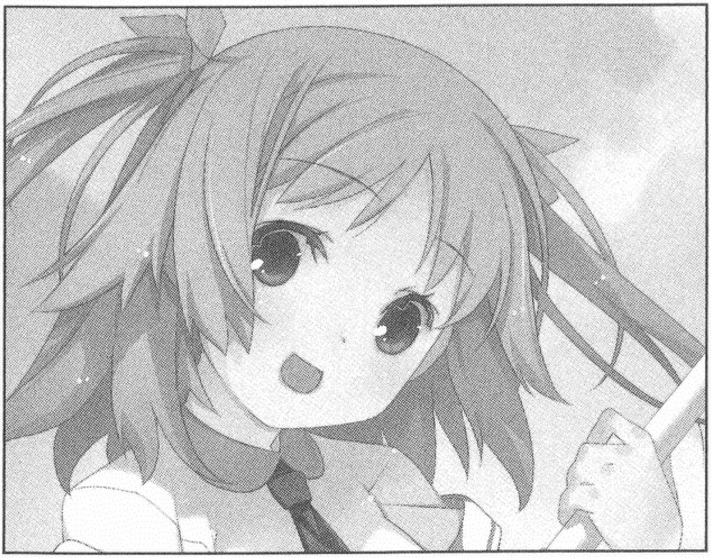
Masuzu grinned.

"What Eita-kun really wants is just my body."

"I beg you, stop talking alreadyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!"

—This is, well, something like that.

A story of me getting caught up in a place where mayhem reigns.



はるさきちわ
春咲千和

高校一年生。鋭太の幼なじみ。
アホの子。元剣道部。
好きな言葉は「食べ放題」。

Harusaki Chiwa.

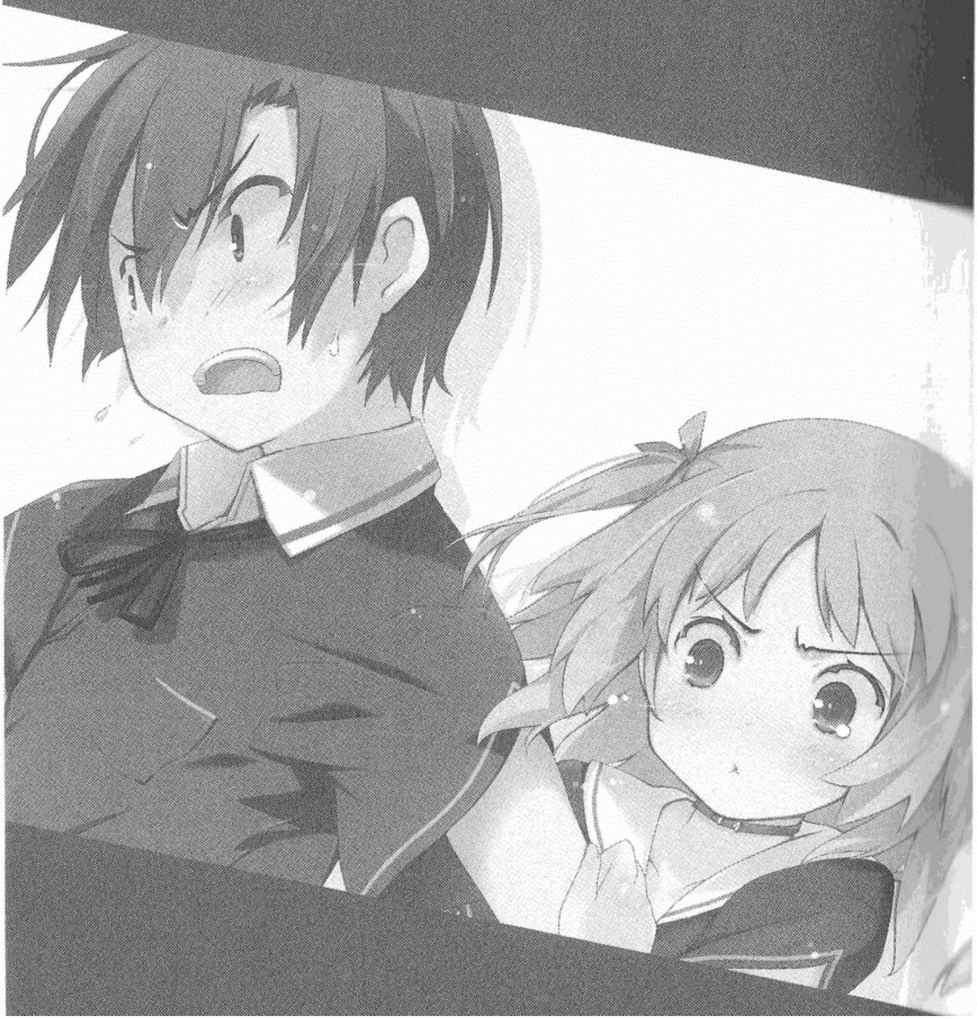
Freshman. Childhood friend of Eita.

Silly girl[13]. Was in the kendo club.

Favorite line is: 'Feel free to eat as much as you wish.'

#1: High School Life begins in Mayhem

＃1　高校生活のスタートは修羅場



Even though it isn't quite suitable to say this myself, but I'm "anti-romance".

I'm not just saying that for show.

Romance, that sort of thing, is nothing but an illusion. It's a disease. If you don't believe me, take a look at couples giggling every now and then in front of everyone. It's annoying to whoever sees them, praying for them to leave. As for their reason to flirt in public? That's because *this* is the real romance. Unmasked it's just Morphine getting emitted everywhere inside the brain, making them lose their shame and all. My attitude towards those people? I always put up with it because I don't care. But when it comes to myself, *that* is another topic altogether. For me, even if it wasn't in public, I would never do such shameless stuff.

Of course, if I had told anyone about these thoughts, they would probably have laughed at it and replied:

'There's no need to pretend being strong.'

'Isn't this just an excuse of someone unpopular?'

Huh?

Me, unpopular?

That wasn't the case.

I had a history of recieving confessions. Nostalgic, those times in the kindergarten... Forget it, those past glories? Who cares?

But really: If other people had given me a response like that, I would've fully understood it. It sounded just as bad as college dropouts saying 'studying schedules have no bearing' - total lack of persuasive power. Since I haven't had a single bit of romance in my entire life up to now, saying things casually like that would've sounded like nothing but the sour grapes of jealousy.

Which pretty much sums up *why* I didn't tell anyone about it, but that truly *is* how I felt.

And the people who had taught me to think like that had been my parents.

The story of how my parents had gotten together: They met; They fell in love; they got married. Just like every other love drama on television. Throughout my childhood I was bombarded with them talking about the ups and downs of their love story. Then by middle school, I was subjected to their endless fights. One day as I was about to go into high school, they both left to seek the 'real one' for them and disappeared forever from my eyes, leaving only a letter entrusting me to relatives and a power of attorney to their house as funds for unsettled expenses.

You! Are! All! Garbage!

Me and my hatred for my parents and romance itself had been to the degree of using 'Hakata Salt's' advertising techniques[14].

Of course, my sound logic told me that not all parents were like mine. On the contrary, people falling blissfully in love and getting married were the majority. Though, I say my logic is sound, however, something like 'fall in love blissfully just to show you!' or any other kind of similar urges are a different matter *entirely*. After all, without romance, life could still go on. Wouldn't make much of a difference avoiding pointless stuff. Besides, I didn't have such time, either.

I have my own ambitions. My target was to get into National University's medical faculty and become a doctor.

However, getting into the medical faculty would've meant a considerable amount of expense, and I simply couldn't give any more trouble to my current guardian Saeko-san.

Kiryuu Saeko-san was my father's younger sister; in other words, my aunt. She was the guardian who took care of me here to clean up my parent's mess. Originally she had thought of selling this tattered house to raise money, but having put my feelings of attachment to this house into account, she eventually moved in and settled down with me together. If it wasn't for Saeko-san, I'd have been moved elsewhere to some unknown relative a long time ago. Therefore, I had decided that one day I'd surely repay this debt to Saeko-san - definitely.

My high school was called Hanenoyama Public High School (shortened it'd be 'Hane High'). In this school we had one policy that went like this: 'The school will award talented students with good conduct a National University place' (scholarship included). And *that* was what I was aiming for.

After having entered high school for the first semester I had already been ranked first in my year. To a person whose results had been in the fairly low district for the entire middle school, this was a staggering feat. I had no intent of slowing down, and would continue working hard to keep my grades up.

Which is why, I had no spare time for romance.

Therefore, this Kidou Eita had sworn himself to the following laws:

1. Studying comes first!

2. No romance! Love is very dangerous!

3. But don't let others believe I'm gay because see second.

As long as I followed these laws, my high school life would be perfect!

—Yet.

There was *someone*.

Even a person like me had a girl attached to me whom I couldn't get away from. A so-called childhood friend, a pitiable fate.

Well, why don't I begin the story about her, then?

◆

It was the end of May, an incident that had happened some day when students were about to change into summer uniforms. Because of work, Saeko-san was often away from home. That was one reason of why I had to do all the housework on my own. Dinner; vacuuming the floor; hanging clothes to dry; all part of my work. In the eyes of others, this might've looked very extraneous. True. But only at beginning. But now, chores had even become one of my hobbies. Especially making dinner, not only would it directly reflect your results, it was also a useful life skill.

It was almost dusk, half past five. I threw all the washed clothes into the dryer, about to step outside for ingredients for dinner. Before that, I had prepared rice and started pouring it into the cooker, when suddenly, short energetic cries of [Yaa!] and [Tah] came from next door.

Just what is she doing...?

After finishing the last touches and bringing the rice cooker into position, I walked down the hallway into the courtyard. Not very big, around the size of the area of three hanging racks, less than ten or more steps to my neighbor's fence. Across the short fence separating both houses, I could see a person dressed in sportswear and skirts, waving her bamboo blade around. I called out and greeted: "Hey— Chiwa—!"

After having stopped her exercise and turning around, Harusaki Chiwa's sweat was sparkling in the sunlight of the remaining sun.

"Hi— Ei-kun! What's for dinner?"

Heh, thinking about food from dawn till dusk.

"Why are you doing exercises with your shinai?"

"I guess because there was a shinai lying around?"

"[...]"

According to my calculations, this person will become addicted to mountaineering activities in the near future.

"That's why, I thought you gave up on Kendo already?"

"The *club* was what I gave up on. Despite all the persuasion from my seniors, I've finally severed my ties with them."

"Did you give up on it because of your condition? Now you're practicing again, won't it..."

Harusaki Chiwa smiled.

"No problem. I had a body check last week and my doctor said if it was just exercising, then I'd be fine~"

"...Really?"

"Really~ . Geez, Ei-kun loves to worry~"

Chiwa had been practicing kendo from elementary school up till the second year of middle school. Rather than "practice", one could say she buried her head in kendo. She even was fourth in the province-wide team competition, second in the singles competition. Her unfavorable height and strength didn't have much effect on her performance, she was even aiming for the nationwide competition next summer.

But then, in the third summer of middle school.

Just as the date for the competition was approaching, Chiwa had been involved in a traffic accident.

While the kendo club was jogging for training, a cargo from a passing by truck coincidentally fell off, crushing Chiwa below it.

Her whole body suffered serious injuries, the damage to her waist was quite severe.

After a large surgery, Chiwa spent her last summer of middle school in hospital.

Although after these events, Chiwa worked really hard for a rehabilitation. While now the after effects do not interfere with her daily life, strenuous activities like kendo are out of the question.

Chiwa never said anything.

Someone like me who has never joined any club can't possible know what it feels like for Chiwa.

But from my point of view, Chiwa was definitely deprived of an important part of her life.

"...Don't push yourself too much. The waist, like how it's written, is the most important part of the body."[15]

"Hmn—?", Chiwa winced her eyes as if contemplating something.

"Ei-kun seems especially kind today? Don't tell me it's because you want to see my panties?"

—?!

"Wh-Whooo wants to see y-your p-p-p—"

Such a failure. Stumbling over something so trivial.

"Ara, ara.[16] Ei-kun must have reached the age where he is interested in these things. Is the word 'panties' too stimulating for you?", Chiwa giggled happily.

Chiwa took a twirl like a ballerina. The short white skirt was lifted by air, revealing her long, slender, healthy legs. Of course, the panties stayed out of sight. ...But still, I couldn't help but get slightly excited. Such a failure.

"Wh-Who would want to see your childish underwear?!"

"Huh, you don't have to insist, you know~"

Curse her...! Such a fun-loving little kid. A mature grown up like me has no common language with her!

"Forget it. I'm going out to buy ingredients for dinner."

"Oh, wait! I'm going with you!"

"Don't. Every time you tag along, *additional expenses* are added."

"I won't nag for snacks this time! I promise!"

Clearly lies...

Every time she just sneaks chocolate and gum and whatnot into the shopping cart.

Whatever. Even if I refuse, this kid will tag along.

"...You have 3 minutes. Hurry up!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah!"

Really. How can such a small little body... Where does all the energy come from...?

◆

From our home to the 'Marutoku' shopping market was an approximately ten minutes trip.

Chiwa was wore a jeans skirt and a sleeveless shirt.

It's only May yet already sleeveless... I don't know whether to call her out-going, or seasonal-sense-lacking.

"Ne, ne, Ei-kun, what are you having tonight?"

"Hmm? Um..."

Through the intelligence received from the flyers that morning, the recipe was all set.

"Japanese-styled taro with fish miso soup and soybean sargassum salad."

Chiwa made an expression as if the end of the world had come.

"Wh-what about meat?!"

"Don't you know? Beans are called the 'vegetarian's meat'."

"...Lately Ei-kun and my mama sound alike."

Chiwa's parents were workaholics, plus their workload was heavy, usually they didn't come home until late night. Since my aunt Saeko-san also came home seldom, dinner was almost always eaten between Chiwa and me.

Entering the shop, we quickly grabbed all the special-priced products. A sudden scent of curry came from the corner of the shop. *Looks like they're trying to sell a new instant curry.*

"Oh, siblings shopping together? If you don't mind, would you like to try some?" Wearing an apron, the saleswoman showed a professional smile.

Since we were small, both of us had always been mistaken as siblings. Although Chiwa only exceeded my height during third to fourth grade, I had always been taken as the younger brother in our pseudo-sibling relationship. Between you and me, I had always taken this as the shame of my life. On the bright side: Chiwa's height had also stopped growing since grade school.[17]

"Itadakimasu~"

Well, no thanks for me. Chiwa, of course, couldn't care less about me, and reached out for the paper plates. Even though her arms looked short, they could extend to an incredible length when reaching for food.

"Here you go. There's two tastes here to try out, heavy and light!"

I guess there is no choice but for me to taste it as well.

...Well, that isn't so bad.

Saeko-san's "instant food" storage was close to being gone. *Why not?*, I thought. *Two would be too many, though.*

"May I ask which flavor is more popular?"

"Huh?"

"Which curry sells better? I'll have one of that."

With a slightly awkward expression, the saleslady pointed to the light curry, whereas Chiwa placed a heavy tasted curry into my shopping cart.

"Oi, Chiwa"

"It's for Saeko-san, right? This one will taste better~!"

The saleslady made a muffled laugh.

Huh? Who made you my mother.

On the way home after lining up and paying, I couldn't help but say:

"Chiwa, please don't interfere with my logical decisions."

"Lo~gi~cal?"[18]

"Compared to your tongue, I'd rather trust the choice of democracy."

"That has nothing to do with it at all. It's just that my taste is the same as Saeko-san's."

"You have no previously gathered data to back up such a claim."

Chiwa shrugged exaggeratedly

"Ei-kun has surely changed a lot in that matter. In middle school you weren't as addicted to talking sense."

"Well, that's normal, isn't it? We are high school students after all."

"Ehh, but I did like the clumsier Ei-kun better —you were hilarious."

"Nnn."

I'm slightly pissed, so I'll say something back.

"*You* never change, still at the stage of a middle, no, at the stage of a grade school child."

"Wh-What? I've grown a lot!"

Chiwa puffed out her chest.

...Umm, that? Nope. Not really far, at least.

"'The late growth of breasts due to immaturity' —If I became a doctor, I would definitely invite you as a test subject for my thesis "

"P-Pretending to be *so* smart! I'm still your three months and ten days older Onee-san!"

"It only further proves your immaturity if you even think that that matters."

"S-Such arrogance! When you are just Ei-kun! *When you are just Ei-kun*!"

Haha, a complete victory for my side. Sadly, defeating Chiwa isn't exactly something to brag about.

And so we returned home and I began preparing dinner swiftly. Fish itself was sold in slices, so roasting it wouldn't be too hard. More important was the Japanese styled taro. It needed to be shaken constantly to not get burnt.

As for Chiwa, she pouted on the sofa hugging her knees, calling out 'Ei-kun is an idiot', 'Stupid', 'Muffled pervert' and all sorts of names.

I can't believe such a sporty girl can take these things so personally. Looks like there's only one thing to do.

"Hey, Chiwa."

"Hmph. I hate Ei-kun the most."

"There's some bacon in the fridge, do you want me to fry it in soya-sauce?"

"Yay! Ei-kun I love you!"[19]

"[...]"

Love bought with 100 grams of bacon.

If treated as special bargain, it'd only cost ¥590...

I mixed all the vegetables into one big bowl and placed it on the table. Although it looked less attractive, we seldom separated the vegetables into single dishes, but instead we ate it directly from one big bowl. Soon it had become a habit. Plus, I had less plates to clean this way.

The two of us ate, going through all sorts of unimportant subjects.

"That reminds me—"

"Reminds you of what?"

"In mangas or in TV dramas, the *female childhood friend* tends to cook..."

"That's right."

"Then why are our characters switched?"

Chiwa looked at me with a bit of confusion.

"Eh? Do you want to eat my cooking?"

"...N-N-N-Never mind."

I was suddenly reminded of myself collapsing from the food she made once. That was a bubbling roasted steak sweetened to the fattening degree. Because we didn't have red wine, we had carbonated grape juice (0% natural) as substitute. When asked of the motive for her crime, Chiwa replied: 'They both look pretty much the same anyways' and 'Besides, I'm sure it should taste better with something carbonated'.

The less a person knew how to cook, the more likely they would be to invent crazy recipes...

"Say...", Chiwa garbled while chewing bacon.

"Is there a girl called Natsukawa Masuzu in Ei-kun's class?"

"Oh, I guess."

Then with a sudden spurt of energy: 'That girl is incredible! Just like a princess! Even the boys in our class are talking about her, so I took a look today. I was shocked! Her hair is silver, her eyes are blue, like some person from Europe or somewhere like that! I also heard her family is super rich!'

"Umm, I guess—", I answered vaguely.

"And she's super popular! Only two months into school, according to sources, the number of confessions she has received already exceeds two digits! I originally thought it was a made-up story from a nosy person, but after seeing her today, I am almost certain of it! Two digits!"

"Ohh—", I agreed vaguely.

"Oh, Ei-kun isn't interested? Or did you already give up because she's out of reach?"

"Not really."

She might be pretty indeed, but it has nothing to do with me.

Besides, for some reason, I can't seem to like her.

Even though I've had two or three conversations with her... it always feels as if there is something hidden behind those acclaimed looks. Should I say, someone *whose real inner side can't be seen? Someone who one never gets truly known.*

"Anyhow, I don't really like her, I guess."

"...Is that so?"

Chiwa nodded a few times.

"Ehehe♪, today's dinner tastes very good."

"No. It tastes the same like any other day."

I wonder what made her feel so happy. Just bacon is enough to cheer her up?

After dinner, the two of us gathered the bowls and chopsticks. After that I started preparing for tomorrow's courses while Chiwa took some manga from the mountainous piles stored in Saeko-san's room and started reading at the sofa.

Saeko-san worked at some game production company. Occasionally she did do stuff like writing scenarios, drawing graphics, even coding and music. In short: She could do it all. The company made 'gal-games' and 'love games', mostly aimed towards girls[20].

Perhaps it's because of work that Saeko-san acted like this at home.

'Yosu! Mo~rni~ng, Eita! Are you used to high school life yet? Have you gotten any flags with any cute girls?'

'No progress at all with Chiwawa-chan? Settings with this kind of childhood friend are usually a highway to happy endings, what have you been doing all this time?'

'When you're in a harem, you have to watch out for their impression —If you focus too much on a single girl and forget about the others, some day bad news will spread!'

Who would be in a harem? You think I'm some oil monopoly king in Arabia?

—Anyway, don't pay too much attention to this stuff.

For the purpose of gathering information for work, Saeko-san had tons of shoujo manga. Reading those manga had recently become a daily habit for Chiwa.

"Hey, the tea's ready. I'll put it down right here"

"[...]"

Chiwa was motionless. She turned out like this whenever she was in the world of manga.

Looks like she's especially focused today.

"...*sniff*."

Chiwa grabbed a tissue from the box and wiped the corner of her eye before blowing her nose with it.

"It would be nice if that happened to me just once."

"Like what?"

"A romance like this."

"How's it like?"

"You gotta read it, read."

I flipped the pages of the manga Chiwa had handed to me. The two childhood friends both had been dating someone else, but one day both of them noticed their love for each other, then after many, many difficult obstacles, the two of them eventually became lovers forever —You get the idea.

"How cliché."

I commented.

"Besides, childhood friends are pretty much like brother-and-sisters, they won't become lovers."

"Is that so? I thought there's some fact to it."

"It only works in stories. Let's take us as an example; one look and you'll see that it's impossible in real life."

"[...]"

...?

I was expecting a 'You've got a point —That certainly *is* impossible...' or some similar response... but she turned out to be silent.

"Y-You've got a point —That certainly *is* impossible..."

Ah, here comes the expected response.

Perhaps she's only too tired from her kendo exercise? Maybe I should add more meat to dinner next time...

"T-Taking the childhood friend setting aside, this kind of romance, or I should say this kind of sweet, or wait, this kind of complete devotion in romance, doesn't seems too bad. Besides, I'm already a high school student."

So that's why.

It's a good thing to want to devote fully into something as a replacement of Kendo, just that—

"So, what do you want to do, then?"

"I want to become super popular!"

...Well, that was direct.

"Fancied by many males, after experiencing many ups and downs, finally settling down with a normal male who has been supporting her from the backgrounds all the time —This is what I should experience at least!"

"...Ah. I see."

How should I put it, feels just like what a book called 'Chihuahua-chan chapter of grown up Love' would be about.

It sounds a bit depressing coming from a friend who's been growing up with her since small, but...

"You should give up. It's ten years too early for you."

"Heh— What?"

"First of all, just the word 'popular' is impossible. I've never seen you with make-up. Moreover, I doubt you have lots of clothes?"

"C-Clothes, I have a lot! I have five workout suits!"

I totally understood her anxiousness in wanting to refute my statements, but in reality, she was just digging her own grave.

"Plus, you never really cared about how other boys look at you. A while ago you were playing soccer with the males in the sports grounds without even changing to sports clothes. And you sit with your legs crossed, when you're in a skirt, you always shake your feet around."

Having her worst habits pointed out, Chiwa stopped moving her legs. Just so you know, she was moving her legs rhythmically all along.

"And I don't have to tell you about how you go on the rooftop in nothing but a towel on your body, hands on hips, gulping down milk in one go. The Asakura's auntie even jokes 'Chiwa-chan looks exactly like my husband', and so..."

The two ponytails from both sides of her head began trembling.

The Asakuras were our neighbors across the street. Their grandpa was a coach, sometimes even attending fitness contests. He was a bearded old guy covered in muscles.

"Anyway, you are a sports girl from head to toe, just like how they say 'Brawn but no brains'. In reality, the way you analyze things is by brute force, facing it directly, guided by power. In addition, you always think like a child, I wouldn't think of someone like that as a high school student..."

"Idiot..."

"...Eh?"

"EI-KUN IS A GIANT IDIOT!"

Ah, there she blows.

"Ei-kun is a jerk! Jerk, jerk, jerk, jerk! How would you know until I try! I'm not brawn but no brains! I'm not a child!"[21]

"[...]"

Thrashing her arms and legs around on the sofa, I really wanted to see her proving me wrong. When I realized I did go a bit overboard, it was already too late. The damage is done.

"Forget it. I've decided", Chiwa stood up from the sofa, "From tomorrow onwards, I will become a person in love!"

"...Eh?"

"Not only will I be in love, I will become super popular! If Chiwawa-chan gets serious, even Natsukawa Masuzu won't stand a chance!"

No, no, wait, wait.

"Do you know how to draw the males' attention? Even abstractly?"

"I'll begin learning right now!"

"And what exactly will you be learning from?"

"From this!"

Chiwa held up the bishoujo manga in front of my face.

"Saeko-san once said, shoujo manga are the bible of love. Therefore I must study well, remember it well, practice it all day long, and win a prize in a tournament!"

"Tournament..."

The stance of someone who doesn't think on anything but sports.

"Let's say... this:" Chiwa flipped to a heroine on some random page in the manga, "Look at the eyes of this heroine, look at them! Don't you find them adorable? If I made the same look, I would definitely become popular with males!"

"...But..."

The heroine's eyes were half the size of her face.

And there was a lot of glitter in her eyes.

How the heck do you plan to imitate that...

"A while ago, a girl next to my desk was reading a magazine 'Pachi Lemon'. It also wrote that 'if you look at boys from below, it will make you popucute[22]!☆'. It seems looking people from below is the secret technique. Oh, I'm very talented at hitting people from above in Kendo!"

"[...]"

Definitely brawny but not brainy.

"I won't tell you otherwise anymore. As for the things I said, I'm sorry. Please reconsider again."

"What?! What are you talking about?! Besides, Ei-kun has never been in love! You've never had a crush on anyone!"

"Oh? Do you?"

"...H-How's that possible?! Ei-kun, you big idiot!"

So I was scolded. What's wrong with this person?

"I'll begin practicing now. Lend me these books, would you?"

Chiwa carried a pile of shoujo mangas with both hands.

"Ei-kun, bye-bye~ Around a week later I will become super popular and by that time you'll realize 'Chiwa-chan is such a perfect girl', but it'll be too late!"

"Yeah, that would be too bad! Too bad!"

And so, I sent Chiwa out of my door.

◆

A week later.

In my class 1-A, a rumor like this started to spread: Class 1-E's Harusaki Chiwa became super popular, and was called out by boys— Of course not.

In reality the rumor was that Chiwa was called by the school counselor's office. In short —She had been staring at boys in her class with bloodshot eyes.

'She'd sometimes stare with blank eyes.'

'Nonetheless it's terrifying.'

You get the idea.

I even heard that Chiwa's mother had come to school to talk as well.

I guess I should probably roast more meat for her tonight.

◆

"Wahh... I followed the instructions on the mangas, yet why am I not popular?" Chiwa swallowed the juicy meat together with her own tears, talking to herself.

"—Ah!"

"What now?"

"Don't tell me... I am too cute to handle?!"

Not, is what I thought.

Post-Chapter Extra

Pachi Lemon's April Edition, Special Support for freshmen Guide

Popcute measure of female High School students!

Reply to student "Cute Chiwawa"

Q1: You wake up in the morning and greet yourself in the mirror. What did you say?
A1: I'm hungry!

Q2: He laughs at your new haircut! What do you do?
A2: Cut Ei-kun's eyebrows off as revenge.

Q3: Your male friend tells you about his troubles regarding love. How do you encourage him?
A3: Let's run 50 laps around the sports ground!

Q4: You have a date at the restaurant with your boyfriend. What do you order?
A4: A big piece of meat!

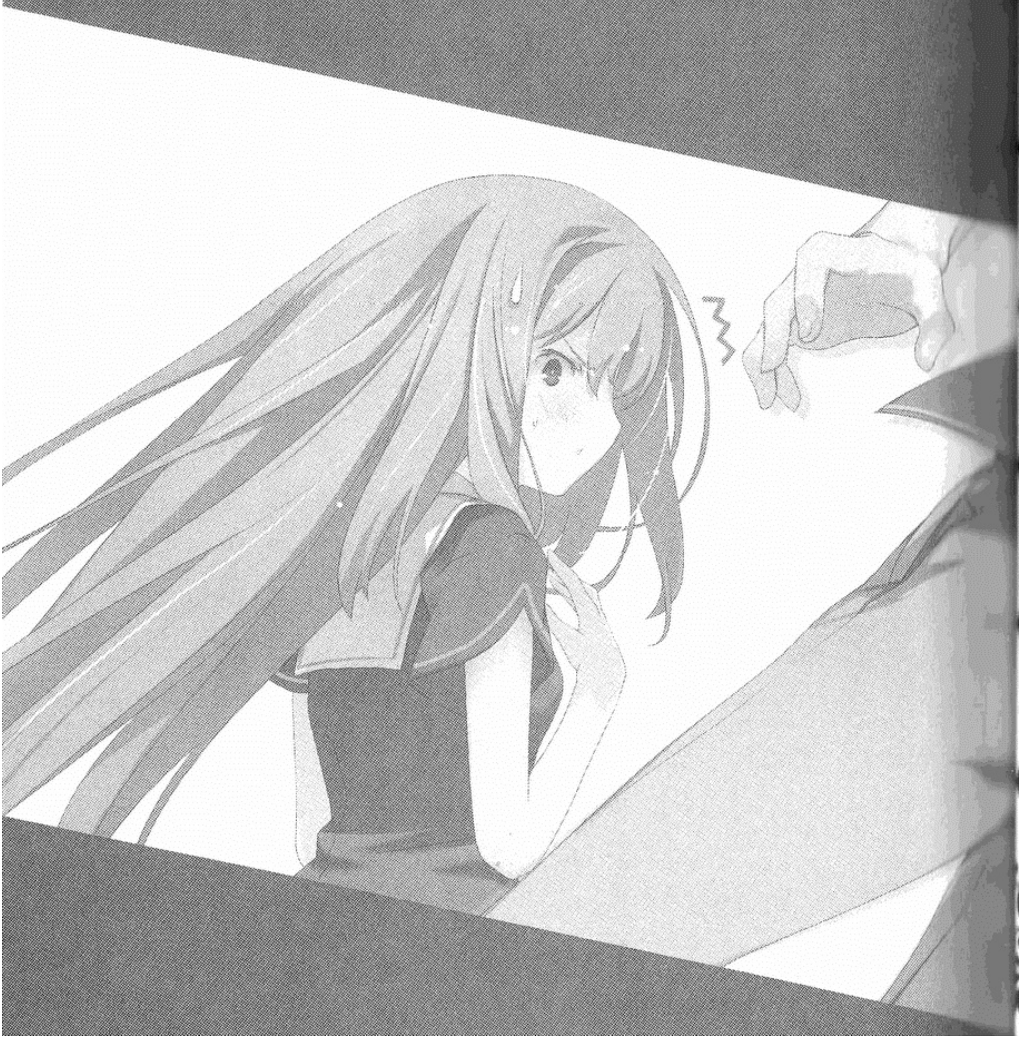
Q5: You accidentally overslept. Although in a hurry, your hair keeps curling up and won't stay flat~ (tears). What do you do?
A5: Instead of this, what's for breakfast??

Your Popucute score: 5/100

Editors of Pachi Lemon: There is still a long way from being popucute. Why don't you try going on a diet?

#2: Confession from a Classmate ends in Mayhem

#2 同級生にコクられて修羅場



Chapter

During the same time while Chiwa sank before she even sailed, there had been another person who continued to score high on the records.

She was Natsukawa Masuzu.

Entering June, the number of people confessing to her was still endless. Rumors went that the number of times she had been confessed to had surpassed 50. According to them, the litigant expressed 'she has no intention to be with anyone'. Despite so, the confessing people continued to flock to her.

From the above situation, it was almost certain that Natsukawa had become a famous person in school, but in reality she was almost always alone. In class or during recess, she'd always be in her seat reading. She went home immediately after school. In the beginning, some boys in the class occasionally tried to hit on her, but a de facto treaty was soon made: 'Single-sided attacks on Natsukawa are banned from the classroom'. Soon it became a steady state of watch but don't touch. As for the girls, they tried to distance themselves from her. Girls popular with boys[23] stated that 'we commoners dare not be together with ojou-sama!' (Translation: We are not as cute as you!) and rejected her. As for the common looks female company, they announced that 'Natsukawa and we are in two completely different worlds' (Translation: Extravagant people should go play with extravagant people) and discriminated against her. This was the perfect proof of how being over-popular was not a good thing, I should've really lectured Chiwa on this.

On the first day of June, I had been given a seat next to Natsukawa. For me, I was completely uninterested in that matter, but was very pleased to be placed in the second column from the windows, last row in class. It was a very comfortable place where I could lie down and rest, but it seemed that my thoughts did not reach the rest of my class. That is as much as I understood from all the jealous glares I got. Being rejected once but not giving up, Yamamoto, a member of the soccer club even came to me for a handshake, saying: 'I believe you are a true gentleman!' Since it would also be quite troublesome being trusted like this, I temporarily refused his handshake request. Next day, class rumors started to spread that 'Natsukawa is also Kidou's target' and whatnot. Sensing danger, I hurriedly went for the handshake.

I should clarify here, I wan't scared or so. Because this is very important, I want to repeat this again: I was definitely not scared. I was only displaying the spirit of peaceful coexistence, the so-called 'Love & Peace'. Oh, forget love, it's 'Peace & Peace'.

...Though, let's say just now I was like a excited little grade-schooler in front of a camera, let's just leave it here for now. In conclusion, all I wanted was to cut waves like butter, aiming for the university place and recommendation. Naturally, love lay in the 'wave' category, much less Natsukawa, this kind of celebrity? Don't joke with me. That's why I tell you, Yamamoto and the other males, you were all worrying for nothing!

◆

"Is that so, then that really sounds bad", hearing my situation out, my classmate Asoi Kaoru slowly nodded his head.

It was currently lunch hour, Kaoru and I joined our desks together and began eating lunch.

I was having a homemade bento. With less appetite, Kaoru's lunch only consisted of a crab bread and a juice box.

"From the point of view of these kids, being able to sit next to Natsukawa-san is really something to be envious about."

Kaoru always used 'these kids', 'them' and similar pronouns to call classmates. It didn't sound irritating either. I guess it was due to his good conduct and his neutral looks and solid attitude to address things. Whether it was between boys or girls, Kaoru was pretty popular.

"If Eita's seat was put up for an auction, I believe you should be able to get a good amount of money."

"When the auction comes, remember to call me. I'll get rid of it at the first bid."

Ah~ it is so hard to be at peace of mind these days. This kind of normal *conversations are always the best.*

As a conversation partner, Kaoru couldn't be any better.

Our friendship started in Grade 9. From our daily conversations, he roughly understood the situation of my family and Chiwa but he never did unnecessary research, the perfect balance between friendship and privacy. He totally deserved the title of being the 'Relationship Master'.

"Compared to this, I'm more worried about Chiwawa-chan."

"What about Chiwa?"

"Once Chiwawa-chan has decided on something, she keeps pushing towards it. I'm afraid she won't give up until she becomes super popular."

"But these things can't really be achieved through plain effort. It's not Kendo", I said while munching on the potato and meat from yesterday's leftover.

Mmm, after one night the flavor is perfect. It would have been great if I made Chiwa a bento as well.

"Personally, I think that Chiwawa-chan only needs to act like a normal girl, she should become very popular that way."

"That's right. If she doesn't talk or move, maybe boys will start going for her."

"A, just like a Komainu[24] from a Shrine...?"

Well, her looks aren't so bad, so maybe it's exactly as we say.

"But Chiwawa-chan was confessed to during middle school."

"By whom?"

"The captain of the male kendo club. It was pretty big news back then, didn't you know?"

First time I've ever heard of it.

In middle school both the male and female kendo clubs were very strong. Especially the captain of the male kendo club, who was excelled in both sports and studies. I heard he later went to the best private high school in this province. He shouldn't look too bad, I guess.

Hmm? So Chiwa also has a past like this.

"But, I never heard about her dating anyone."

"Of course you didn't. She rejected him."

"Why would she give up such a great chance?"

"...Fuuu", Kaori made a deep sigh.

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. I just thought that these are your honest thoughts from the bottom of your heart."

"Of course. I don't joke around."

"I know. That's because Eita is a very serious person."

What... Are you trying to say something else?

"If Chiwawa-chan really turns super popular, I'm afraid she'll have other problems by then."

"What problems? Is she going to reject other people again? That's not possible. It's different from last time."

She's only doing this because she wants a boyfriend, no...

...Wait. Is it really like that?

She did say that she wanted romance like a shoujo manga, but I don't think she ever said anything about a boyfriend...

Hmmm...

"I really have no idea what's going on inside Chiwa's head."

"...Yareyare..."[25], Kaoru shrugged.

The five minutes preparation bell which signaled the end of lunchtime rang.

◆

That day, after school.

"Kidou-kun, how would you like to go home with me today?", Natsukawa suddenly asked me this. The whole classroom fell into shock.

But no one could be more shocked than me.

What does this mean?

Why me? This is too sudden, isn't it?

Slightly flustered, I unconsciously took my books that were already in my bag out again. *I must have heard it wrong? Yes, these words must have come from the guy sitting behind me. That's right, that must be it.*

But when I turned around, there was nobody.

...Well of course, this is the last row after all.

"So? Shall we go home?", Natsukawa stared down at me.

...Dammit. I'm not so easily tricked.

Natsukawa certainly is *a beauty. Just those blue eyes and silver hair are enough to attract everyone's attention. Since her looks are very proper as well, not only does she look very adorable when she smiles, it also gives an easy-to-approach and gentle feel. Even a finely handcrafted doll can hardly keep up with her. The amount of detail the maker gave her himself is fabulous. If she were to dress up in a skirt, even if she claimed herself to be a princess from a foreign country, I'm sure plenty of people would believe her.*

But so what? Back in my mother's days, she was also called the beauty of the town. Beautiful women cannot be trusted.

I should just give a cool response, rejecting her categorically!

Glaring at Natsukawa, I told her directly:

"That... that... that actually, say... I... today, I have something to do!"

Curses...

'Something to do' was the ultimate excuse.

"...Is that so? That's a shame."

Natsukawa replied politely, then left with a 'I'll be going first'.

Phew, that sure was tense.

I wonder what's with this sudden invitation?

Although we do exchange a few words because of how we're neighbors in class, that much isn't enough to go home together.

Probably a beauty's sudden urge. By tomorrow she'll definitely forget all about me.

Life just has to prove me wrong.

The second day, then the third day, Natsukawa continued to invite me to walk her home.

"What are your intentions?", I couldn't help but ask Natsukawa with a small voice, just so I wouldn't catch the attention of the entire class.

Natsukawa tilted her head in a cute way and repeated: 'Intentions?'

"Is this some kind of punishment game? Or perhaps I'm on candid camera with your friends hiding in some corner? I'm not so easily tricked!"

Natsukawa smiled. One deadly smile it was indeed.

"I— can I say it?"

"S-Say what...?"

Don't fall for it! Keep calm...

"The reason why I want to go home with you, it's okay even if I say it right here?"

"That's what I was talking about all along."

"That is... be—"

Natsukawa suddenly stopped. Her eyes shifted as if hesitating, then she looked at me with teary eyes:

"Becau—, I like you!"

The air in the classroom froze.

My mind was blank. Difficultly, I uttered one word:

"...Huh?"

"I'm head over heels in love with you!"

"Wait, I'm not sure I understand you..."

"I'm thinking of erotic things with you!"

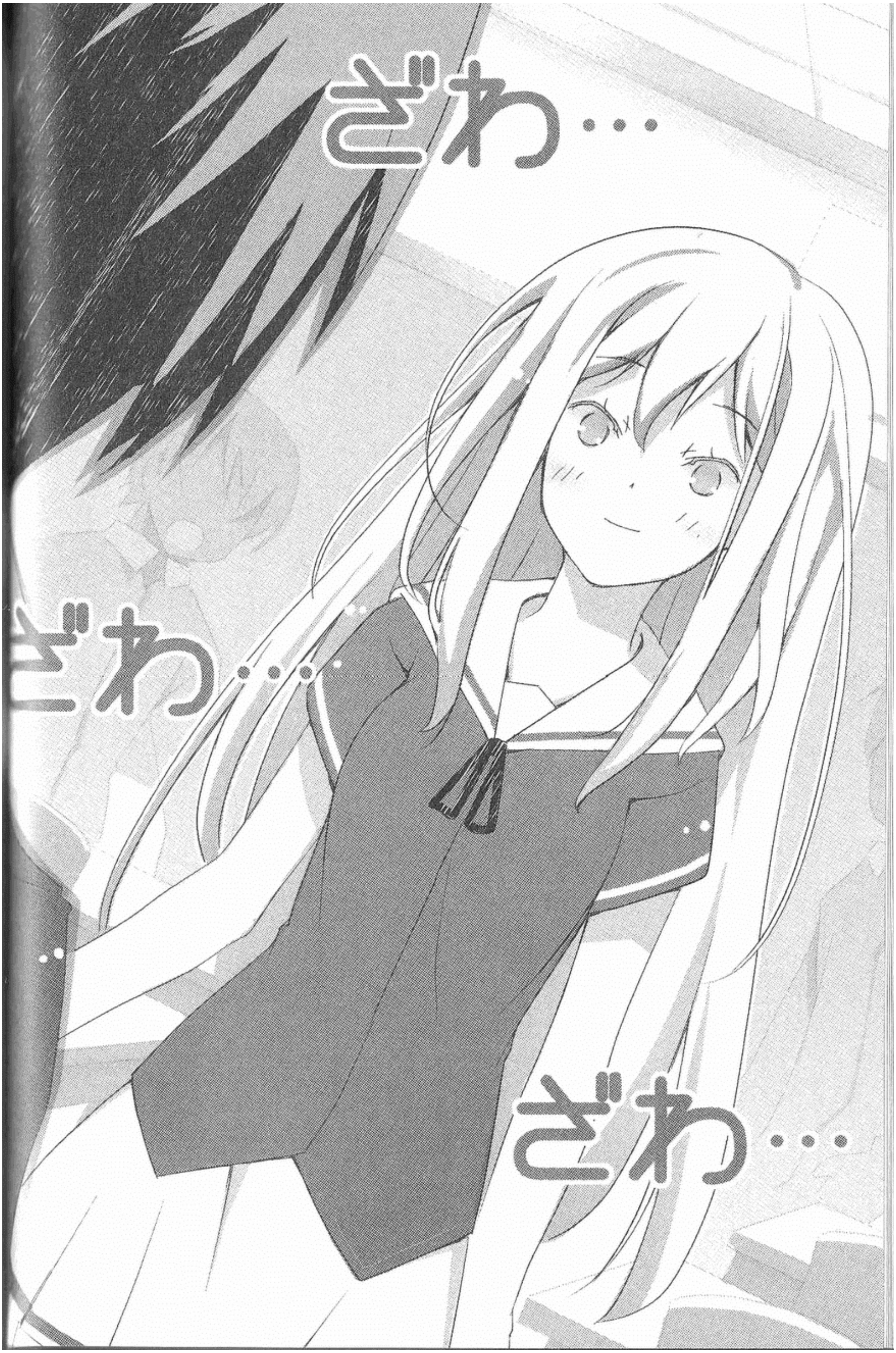
"That's even harder to understand!"

"I am thinking of erotic things about you!"

"Yes, I get it, but you are only making the situation worse than it already is!"

Cries spread throughout the classroom. There were 'Ahhh—' screaming girls, there were frantic murmurs between some, there were also a few with nothing but disbelief on their faces. The Yamamoto I mentioned before crumbled to a kneel on the ground like a pitcher having thrown a decisive home runner — except that this guy was from the soccer club.

"Seems like we have caused a great disturbance."


ざわ…
ざわ…
ざわ…

Natsukawa smiled shyly.

Suddenly placed under this situation, I had no idea what to do.

"I think we shouldn't stay here for long, or rumors will start spreading."

If you are worrying about that, then it's already too late!

"Please, wherever you want is fine, just take me with you~", she seemingly recited a line from some romance TV drama.

Even though this line couldn't be more unreal, when it came from her, it sounded as if she meant it. Maybe it was because of her looks after all?

—*What's wrong with you beauties, you disgust me!*

◆

"However, despise all, I still followed her words, tehe~"[26]

"Now's not the time to sing 'tehe~'!"

"What's wrong?" Natsukawa, who was walking beside me asked. "Compared to voicing the tsukkomi[27] of your inner thoughts, it would be better not to speak at all~ otherwise you will look very suspicious~. You should be more considerate of me who's walking next to you right now~"

"Then don't stick next to me, hurry and go home by yourself...!"

Since both Natsukawa and I went to school by foot, the two of us were walking in the opposite direction to where the station is. This was the best case out of this worse case, I guess. If we had to take the train home, I would have broken out in cold sweat from the glares of eavesdropping classmates in the same carriage.

After walking into some less populated roads of one of the residential areas and confirming there's no one around, I urged:

"Isn't it about time you tell me everything?"

"Tell you about what?"

"Why did you lie like that?"

"What lie did I tell?"

"The confession. Especially the part where you said you 'like' me. That was all a lie, right?"

Hearing so, Natsukawa widened her eyes.

"How rude... After I've gathered so much courage as to confess, you start thinking it's a lie?"

"That's right!"

"You think I actually despise you?"

"...Exactly."

"Merely seeing your face is unpleasant. Even breathing the same air as you is hateful. Having to sit next to you in class, frankly I can't possibly stand it. Yay, yay, idiot, idiot, you virgin bastard; stop acting like you're so high and mighty when you're just some miserable little chicken —like *that*?"

"I haven't actually thought that it was like *that*..."

What's with this woman? She's like an entirely different person from the quiet and behaving Natsukawa in class.

"—Since you have already seen through everything, I suppose that it can't be helped."

I didn't expect Natsukawa to give up so easily.

"Like you said, that confession was in fact a lie. As expected of Kidou-kun, looks like I was right, you are a little different from the other boys."

"...Hrmph."

This sort of praise certainly made me somewhat grumpy, it gave out an unpleasant feeling.

"Well, where should I start first—"

Staring at the clear and fresh nightfall, Natsukawa gave a big yawn.

I watched her beautiful hair wave behind her back, waiting for her to continue.

Right at this moment.

A rather strong breeze blew past us, lightly lifting up her skirt.

Originally, I expected to only be able to see her thighs, but this wind surprisingly revealed everything under the skirt in broad daylight.

In other words—

"...Not ...Not wearing...?!"

What should be there, wasn't.

At where thighs end, you should be able to see them, but there was nothing there.

...Sigh, there's no need to be secretive using synonyms.

Underwear. Shorts. Panties. Undies.

Though a variety of names, no such cloth existed under her skirt. *None*.

Nononono, waitwaitwaitwait, calm down, calm down. It's still too careless to jump to conclusions right now. Maybe it's just out of sight.

Just the right degree of wind such that I am not able to see at this angle —maybe just that. Although her skirt is already at its highest position possible, this does not necessarily imply 'can't see something like that there'. This explanation certainly sounds much more reasonable.

But what if she really didn't wear *any*?

That would be bad.

Knowing such an important secret, how should I keep it?

...No, I should think outside the box, I should use a doctor's psychological perspective to determine which case it actually belongs to. How would I expect Natsukawa Masuzu to be? Wear underpants? What kind of underpants would she wear then?

—This sure is challenging.

As an ojou-sama returning to her home country, what kind of underwear would they wear?

Those which even no-underpants specialists would feel 'looks very high-class! ' kind of underpants? Can't imagine how. Those which makes people think 'as expected of a returnee', 'that's so international' kind of underwear? Hard to imagine either. Speaking of which, underpants are exotic to begin with.

Or is it an unconventional Japanese style[28]*?*

What would a Japanese style underpants look like...? Diapers? Cloth? No, this doesn't seem realistic either. This way, my image of this mysterious beauty Natsukawa Masuzu will come crashing down?

—Then, we have little choice but to make this conclusion:

None!

Is that so bad?

There are no more competitions between the cotton faction nor the silk faction, nor are there any conflicts between patterned faction and single-colored faction. Even the decision to wear underwear or not when dressed in yukatas wouldn't be enough to be to cause an argument —Isn't this exactly the 'Peace & Peace' I hoped for?! The world is very peaceful these days.

Come, let us chant together once more!

"Panties."

"I'm wearing them."

A small smile from Natsukawa debunked by theory.

"I'm wearing."

She repeated with a doubt-unsparing tone.

"Mmm, then that would be very troublesome."

"Why?"

"The Earth will be destroyed because of the third world war."

"I-If it will, then so be it."

Natsukawa replied casually.

"Any world where it's acceptable to suspect your classmate of not wearing *them*, deserves to be destroyed."

"The world gets destroyed because of me...?!"

Becoming the world's largest sinner, I don't think I'm up for it.

"Sorry. I was thinking too much."

"Very well. I like honest people."

Natsukawa smiled. I feel as if being toyed around in her hands.

"...Speaking of which, what were we originally talking about?"

"We were at why I needed to make a fake confession to you."

"It's a long story—" With this opening, Natsukawa dived directly into the subject, "There are always males after my hand, I'm sure Kidou-kun knows about it, right?"

"If it's rumors about the number of times you have been confessed to have reached two digit numbers, then yes."

"For your information, I have been confessed a total of 58 times in two months."

"That's almost once a day."

That was just like the scenario of a manga.

"It may sound like a luxurious problem, but I am annoyed to my limit. Every single day boys from other classes and seniors will surround and watch me, just like observing a koala. There are even foolish gambles on who will win my heart. There's always some groundless rumor about me, not a single good thing comes from this."

"You don't have friends? Mates from middle school?"

"Nope. Since the age of seven I have been living overseas. Returning home only happened recently in March."

Is that so? That sure is a difficult situation to be in.

"Why don't you just give the OK to somebody?"

"And who would this 'somebody' be?"

"Just pick one from those confessing to you. As soon as you become boyfriend and girlfriend, the other people will automatically back off, won't they?"

"...Fuu."

Natsukawa winced her eyes, literally sparkling.

"Boyfriend and girlfriend?"

As if spitting alien objects that accidentally entered her mouth, Natsukawa said:

"Why do I have to be on the same level as this trash? Treating love as the most valuable thing to worship, paying tribute every Christmas or Valentines' day, giggling 'hohohohahaha' like idiots. I see no reason, which leaves me no choice. Love is an amazing thing? Why the hell do people kill because of emotional disputes then? Why are there so many husbands and wives getting a divorce as soon as they marry? Why are there always children abandoned by parents?"

A dim flame burned within the crystal clear eyes of Natsukawa.

"You should understand, Kidou-kun. Love is not such a perfect thing to have —at least not everyone can unconditionally praise. If you want to be in love, by all means. No thanks here. 'Finding the feeling of a heart jumping'? 'Love more deeply'? 'Going for the girl of my dreams this summer'? Waste of time. To me, this is no different from the persuasions of a religious cult. Except that this religion is called 'Love' —it's the worst religion on Earth!"

Natsukawa's spiteful tongue, I've had heard that before, but this one seemed to be different in nature. This speech was full of genuine hatred towards romance.

...Scary.

"Oh, I get it."

Wiping off the sweat on my palm to my trousers, I nodded and concluded.

"For that reason you 'confessed' to me, right?"

Natsukawa's expressions seemed to calm down.

"As expected of the top student of our grade, learning so quickly saving both of us time."

In short, this means:

If she manages to make a boyfriend, all the never-ending confessions will finally come to an end. But since Natsukawa doesn't want any love, she sought out a person willing to act as her boyfriend —end of story.

"But, why me?"

"Because you're just like me, right?" Natsukawa poked my chest with her long thin fingers, "I quickly noticed how little interest you show in love too... I could even say hatred. When talking to friends, you quickly change the subject when it's in the red area. Even your responses become vague and hasty. Isn't that so? I haven't sat next to you for such a long period of time for no reason."

"You, you are quite observant."

"In the beginning I just thought you were gay."

"[...]"

I take back my words. Observant my ass.

"Which is why I officially make a request to you, Kidou-kun. Please become my 'boyfriend'."

Hm, at least I understand everything now.

As an anti-romance myself, it couldn't be more suitable to be her boyfriend.

Yet...

"I refuse."

Natsukawa slightly tilted her head.

"It's only boyfriend in name, all you need to do is to escort me home each day. Since we both walk in the same direction, it shouldn't be too much trouble."

"Wrong. The other male students will be jealous of me, the girls will surely gossip. I may even be called out and be beaten up by your fans."

"You really know how to worry. It'll make you bald, you know?"

"Perfect. I've been collecting hair tonic and wig company's messages."

Always thinking of the worst possible case - Kidou's way of doing things.

"—We may be more alike than you think..."

Natsukawa smirked.

This smile was different from the smiles she'd shown so far, it carried much more meaning to it.

"Y-You're afraid of balding as well?!"

"No, I meant how both of us like to worry. I've also had my worries if this 'boyfriend' request was rejected. These things are hard to say. If rumors were spread around carelessly..."

"Who do you take me for? I'd never do such things."

"Of course I believe in you. Just that as someone who likes to worry, I always hope everything goes according to plan... which is why, Kidou-kun..."

Natsukawa suddenly brought her face close. Her breathing was even closer.

Those two blue eyes looked at me as if they were about to suck a person in, freezing my entire body.

"To become a candidate for 'boyfriend', other than the factor that they have to be uninterested in romance, there is another important criteria. Do you know what that could be?"

"What is it?"

Her sweet shampoo scent made my nose a little bit itchy.

I was feeling dizzy.

"Kidou-kun, the other criteria is that —he must be someone who will never betray me. There is no one but Kidou-kun who is able to fulfill these requirements; thus, I will not let Kidou-kun escape that easily. *Kidou-kun...*"

Although quiet as a whisper, her extraordinary face made it very captivating.

Natsukawa took a small step backwards and faced me with her back, then took out a slightly dimmed yellow notebook from her own bag.

"What's in that dirty notebook?"

Natsukawa didn't reply, but opened the notebook and started reading instead.

"April, 21st. Sunday. Sunny. I went to 'Imamura' shop to purchase a pair of fingerless gloves, but was told by a worker with an unbelievable expression they don't have any. The product selection of this shop is so incomplete. Or maybe they're out of stock because it's too popular? I want to buy them as soon as possible, then run as hard as I can on the chilly streets."

"...Huh?"

What's up with her? Suddenly reading all this stuff.

Fingerless gloves? Those gloves without fabric for the fingers?

Is there anyone who still wants that kind of thing?

"April, 22nd. Monday. Today a sudden downpour came as I was going home. Even though I had my umbrella with me, I still came home all wet. I like rain, it can cleanse all the dirty sins[29] on my body..."

*Nonono, a cold is all you'd get. Besides, 'cleanse all the dirty sins on my body' *smile*, who do you think you are?*

"April, 23rd. Tuesday. Cloudy. On my way home, Chiwa asked me: 'Why are you carrying firecrackers on your body?' I replied: 'Then how do you plan to respond to those 'out of control terrorists'-attack?' Chiwa was completely refuted by my words. Women are so shallow."

Bwhahahaaaa, dumbass! Rather than worrying about a terrorist attack, why don't you first worry about your brain! Besides, how are firecrackers going to repel terrorists? Can't you see that Chiwa is wordless from your stupidity—

"Hey... ISN'T THAT MY NOTEBOOK—[30]?!"

Natsukawa turned around and smiled.

"Correct. This is Kidou-kun's diary from middle school."

"HOW DID YOU GET YOUR HANDS ON IT—?!"

"Bought it from the old bookstore in front of the station. ¥525 (tax incl.)."

"Impossible!"

"It's true. The diary was inside the 'Illustrated Animals Encyclopedia (special ver.)'-box. The shop keeper was fairly old, I'm afraid he didn't realize of this being placed on the shelves."

—Certainly, I did *place my diary in the box of my gift for getting into grade school. But that box should be stored safely inside my cupboard right now...*

Wait, is that so?

Maybe I accidentally sold it along with the animal book during the second-hand book sale?

Nononononono, that's impossible. I removed the animal book out of the box back then. But, eh?

"Refusing to embrace reality is a very foolish thing to do, Kidou-kun."

But the diary Natsukawa was waving in front of me was unmistakably mine.

"Quite the child during middle school? It's drastically different from the top student you are now. Or perhaps deep inside you're still the same?"

"Give... Give it back!"

"Unlikely."

Natsukawa turned around swiftly.

"Hurry and give it back! There's a lot of bad things inside that diary!"

"Rest assured. I have already scanned everything and stored it inside my computer."

"Huuuuuuuuuuuh?!"

"Though, security such as all necessary antivirus and firewalls are installed, there's still a chance it could be accidentally leaked out. The internet world is very scary... I've heard that when uploaded to the internet, something will last there forever."

I knelt down on my knees.

They say your sights turn black when in despair... Looked like it's real.

In front of my eyes it was pitch black.

Over.

My life is all over—

"Then, I'd like to hear you answer again."

As the absolute dominator, queen Natsukawa's commanding voice came down from the skies.

"Kidou Eita-kun, will you by my 'boyfriend'?"

"...D-Demon...!"

"Ah, there seems to be something wrong with my ears. Could this be the premonition of a computer virus attack?"

"Yesyesyesyesyesyesyesyes! I'll do it! I agree to become Natsukawa-san's 'boyfriend'!"

"Then from now on please call me Masuzu[31]."

Masuzu slyly winked.

She looked so adorable. How enraging.

"Let's go home together again tomorrow. I love you, Eita-kun~"

◊

Back then, when my parent's relationship was still all right and I was still in a common family like everybody else— which means the me before entering high school, had a completely opposite way of seeing things.

Wanted to attract attention.

Wanted to be different from other people.

In general, I liked some minute (I personally think awesomeness) fashion trends, wanted to exhibit 'the me living in an extraordinary life', showing off all sorts of weird postures copied from animes and mangas.

Later on, I heard that this is the so called 'Eighth Grade Syndrome'[32].

The me different from other people?

An unusual me?

How foolish.

You have no idea how valuable it was to be average.

Being able to eat an average meal, go to school on an average day, accompanied by an average family—

You have no idea.

◊

Back home, the first thing I did was to turn the cupboard inside out.

"...Gone..."

The illustrated animal encyclopedia I once loved was gone.

All the Indian elephants, the white palmed gibbon, Japanese marmoset, all of them gone.

Which means that woman was telling the truth—

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHH—"

And so began the intriguing 'boyfriend-girlfriend' relationship between Natsukawa Masuzu and me.

Post-Chapter Extra

Masuzu: "Speaking of which, did you manage to buy those gloves in the end?"

Eita: "...I made my own from work gloves."

Masuzu: "Ohhh..."

Eita: "Then used a red marker and wrote the word 'ANNIHILATE'[33] on the knuckles."

Masuzu: "Ohhhhhhhh..."

#3: Girlfriend V.S. Childhood Friend = Mayhem

#3 彼女VS.幼なじみ＝修羅場

Chapter

The news of Matsuzu Natsukawa had spread without much assistance throughout the entire school by the next day. Such fearful propagation power, or should I say infectivity. Whoever hooked up with whoever, whoever got dumped by whoever, these sorts of stories could be heard ten miles away as soon as it happened. Not because Natsukawa had been spreading the good word everywhere, but because the passion of romance believers went beyond the passion of Catholics of the medieval ages by far.

Speaking of which, perhaps Natsukawa did have a hand in this. After all, if rumors cannot spread effectively, she wouldn't have the need to start a pseudo-confession to protect her "barrier" to begin with.

Every recess or break we had, people from other classes rushed over to observe me. 'So it's that guy?', 'Seems very normal', 'One really can't figure out the taste of ojou-samas.' Just these unscrupulous comments, I already began to understand Natsukawa's feelings. This certainly was very hard to deal with.

Yamamoto of the soccer club requested to shake my hand for the second time this month.

"If you don't give Natsukawa happiness I will never forgive you, yo☆!"

Oh, Yamamoto-kun. You are too dazzling.

If I could, I'd love to offer you the right to bring forth Natsukawa's happiness. I really do.

—Speaking of which, hurry up and assist me! I beg of you!

◆

That day, at the end of school.

"Humans should know when to give up, Eita-kun."

Said the Masuzu beside me with an ojou-sama's attutide.

"Just like our classmate Yamada said, let's work together for my happiness."

"Only *your* happiness!"

Oh and also, it wasn't Yamada, but Yamamoto. Regardless this had nothing to do with the topic.

We chose not to take the main roads but a longer route with less people. Even though slightly longer, we had little choice. It was relatively better than to walk home under jealous surveys and irritating whispers.

Masuzu clapped her hands together.

"Speaking of which, Eita-kun."

"What?"

"From now on, since we'll be spending a rather long period of time together after school every day, don't you think we should spend this period of time better?"

"...Sure, that'd be more constructive."

The journey Masuzu and I took is from the school all the way to the convenience store on Third Street. The distance was about 1.5 kilometers, around 20 minutes of walking distance.

"Arguing each day for these 20 minutes isn't exactly a good use of time. We should try and make it more meaningful, certainly by working together."

"And? What suggestions do you have?"

"Well that's of course... buying something to eat, going somewhere to play for a while."

"That seems rather interesting. But spending each day like this would seem a bit... More importantly: I don't want to reduce the time I spend studying, in addition to the burden of washing clothes and making dinner. Therefore I should waste as little time and money as possible."

"Then I guess we should just stick to chatting."

"Like the sweet lovey-dovey talks between boyfriends and girlfriends, eh?"

"...Lovey-dovey talks, eh?"

"...Lovey-dovey talks."

Goosebumps appeared on both Masuzu's arms and mine.

"No way."

"Impossible."

I spat on to the ground.

Masuzu straightened her hair.

"Thinking carefully, there's no need to stick with those kind of lover's talk."

"True, after all it's all just play act."

"As long as it's something we can talk about. Such as let's say the TV shows we've seen yesterday, that's a common topic."

"Understood. Let's begin from there, then."

Masuzu cleared her throat.

"Eita-kun. Did you watch yesterday's 'Magure Punishment Extreme'[34]?"

Ho. This person sure knows how to make a good discussion topic. Maguke [35] is my favorite TV show.

"Of course. Oh, that last scene was the most memorable! You know, the scene where his partner gets shot by the fugitive, then out of nowhere he pulls out a cigarette, then saying 'Bastard, didn't you know I was quitting'. That line was incredible! It really makes you look forward to the next episode! The kind of feel where he has gone through all sorts of pain in life. There are too little dramas like these nowadays! This is godlike! The best show ever!"

Masuzu lowered her head uncomfortably.

"That... I never planned to make such a deep conversation."

"...Oh, is that so?"

"Besides, I was never interested in that show."

"Then why the heck did you ask me?!"

That bitch...

You made me waste my passionate emotions.

"What I originally planned was to make a point that topics with Eita-kun seem rather lacking and attempted to begin with a popular TV show."

"Well, looks like topics between us are very lacking indeed, I'm sorry!"

"An inadequate life can be aided with food and money, but what can an inadequate topic be aided with?"

No matter what, I can never leave 'topic poverty' in her eyes.

Unhappily, I said:

"What about common hobbies or things we like?"

"And what would Eita-kun's hobbies be?"

"Hmm? Hmm..."

Suddenly asked directly, it did seem hard to answer.

My hobbies... What would they be? I guess it all leads to cooking?

"When listing please exclude peeking up skirts at staircases and stealing panties, these two—"

"Did I ever have those two hobbies?!"

Masuzu took two steps backwards with a shocked expression

"D-Don't tell me it is not a hobby but a way of living already?!"

"Like I said, there's no such thing!"

"I'm really sorry. Looks like I injured Eita-kun's most pure impressions towards panties. How about as an apology I let you see my..."

Masuzu bit her lips as if regretful, then began pulling up her skirt.

"Waaah—! Waaah—! Ahhh——!"

"Please don't yell loudly. I'm also clarifying your previous suspicions of 'not wearing any'."

A group of elementary school kids and chatting housewives gave me cold stares.

...Why look at me?!

You crazy people, why am I the conspirator here?!

"Today's underwear is rather bold. Not only does it have flowery sides, at the very end of it, it is actually transparent... if I were to know I would be harassed like this, I should have worn underpants more suitable for a high school student."

"Stop talking as if I'm the bad guy!"

"For your information, it's *black*."

"*Black*, she said!"

Her skirt was slowly being lifted up, revealing her long slender legs.

I couldn't help but form white foam in my mouth.

Her white dazzling legs.

They were of someone who hasn't gone out much.

Smooth and sturdy, there was something that slightly triggered you, letting people unconsciously look forward to what comes next. Ahead of here, lied *black*—

Masuzu let go of her skirt making it flop.

All that could be seen were the clean linings, the skirt then gently fell downwards, once again covering her legs.

Masuzu stuck out her tongue.

"Even if you're my 'boyfriend', it's only been two days since we've started dating. Something like this hasn't been stipulated within our arrangement."

"I don't know about that... Shameless..."

I knelt down on the pavement, helpless and weak.

I was fooled with...

The pure emotions of a high school student were toyed with...

"Get up, Eita-kun. Our happy times together have just begun."

Certainly, we have not even reached halfway of our journey.

And yet it already is a horrible nightmare.

"Stand up like a man, and let's head forth to our bright enjoyable conversation!"

"...Maybe."

I wiped my tears off.

Well, they say the more you feel like this, the more you should have an optimistic view towards a revolution.

"Then let us start another topic~"

Masuzu cleared her throat,

"Eita-kun, did you watch 'Punishment Extreme' yesterday?"

"Yeah. I did."

"What do you think about it?"

"Hmph — Rather interesting, I guess?"

"You watched that kind of amazing show and yet that's all the comments you can give? What a boorish man."

"You— you, are you messing with meeeee—?!"

"Argh, such a headache. No matter what we talk about we'll never be able to have a good conversation."

"And *you* are actually the cause—!"

At this moment.

"Ho-Holding hands and such, indecent! Too indecent!"

Chiwa pointed towards us, her face completely red.

Her backpack was rising and falling in sync to her deep breaths, I assume she just ran full speed from school to where we were.

But holding hands? No, we aren't.

Just as I was thinking like this, before I knew it, Masuzu hugged my left arm tightly. What on earth was she thinking?

"Ei-kun, th-this, what is, i-is all this?!"

This person seemed to be after us because of the rumors of Masuzu and me.

Chiwa hated it when I hid things from her. Even if it was a good thing she'd angrily say: "How unexpected". If it was a bad thing then she'd angrily say: "Why didn't you talk to me?"

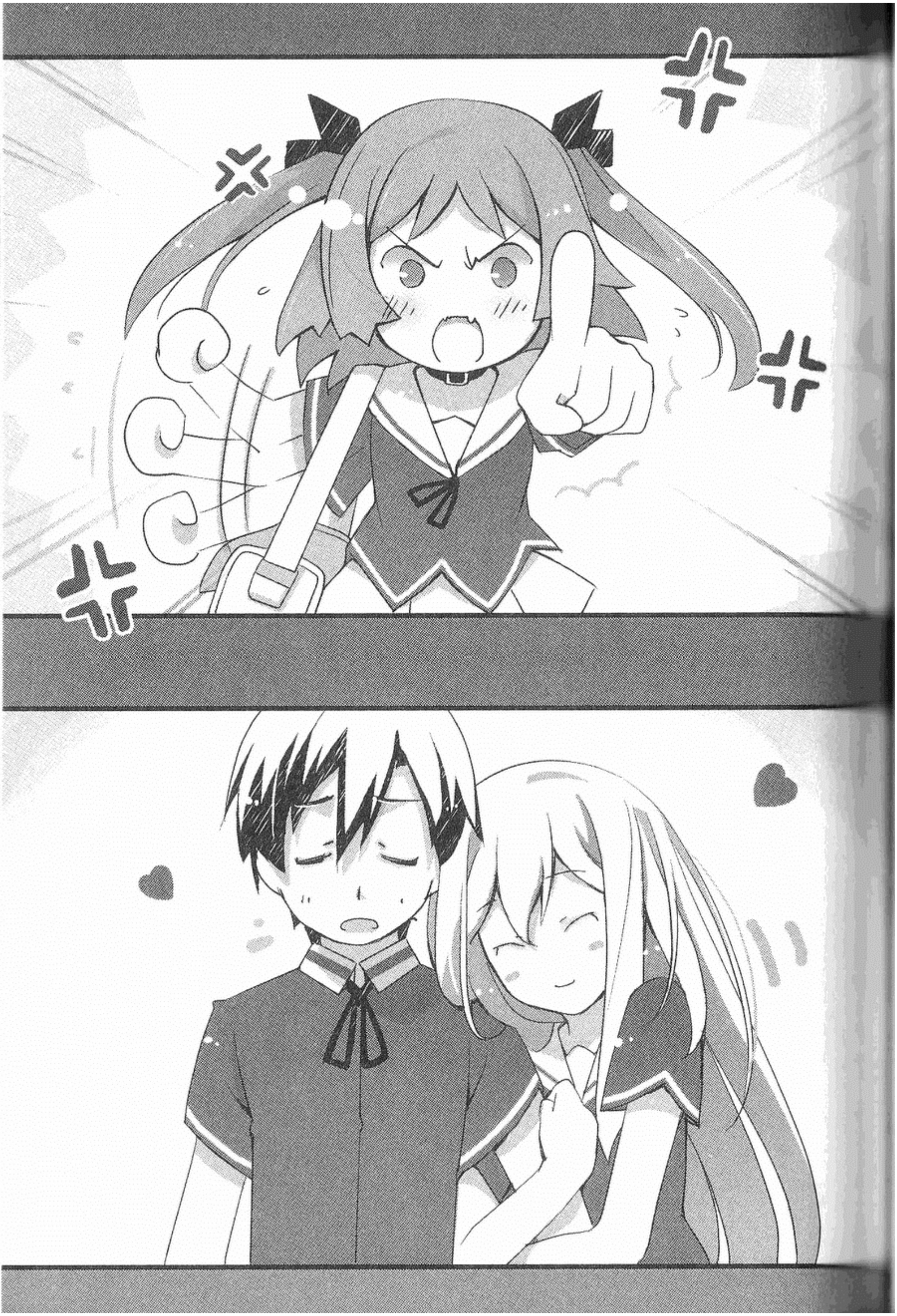
I wonder if this falls into the good category of the bad category.

I guess overall it's good?

Making a girlfriend is something that deserves to be congratulated?

But wait, her reaction is—

"Getting popular before I do, Ei-kun is acting to arrogant here—!"



Uh.

Why am I always the punching bag?

"Ohh Eita-kun, who is this little kid right there?"

Masuzu acted as if only noticing the presence of Chiwa a moment ago, asking with her head slightly tilted.

"I-I'm not little! It's just that you're too big!"

"OK, OK, OK. Which elementary school are you from again?"

"I'm not an elementary school student! Moreover, I'm wearing the same uniform as you do!"

"Oh, I see. Are you a fan of Eita-kun?"

"Who'd be a fan of him?!"

"Then are you a member of the Anti-Eita Society?"

"Are there only two extremes in your head?!"

"Then who are you exactly?"

Chiwa for some reason announced confidently:

"I. Am. Ei-kun's. Child-. Hood. Friend. Harusaki Chiwa!"

"Just because you're a childhood friend you believe you are entitled to do such kind of violent behavior?"

Masuzu winced her eyes, as if trying to pierce through Chiwa just by looking.

"Entering the space of a romantic date between a couple after school, don't you think that it deserves to be kicked to death by a horse?"

Oh Masuzu-san, is this called a date now? A fun date where I was scolded all the way as 'panty thief' or 'boring man' and whatnot...?

"...Ei-kun! Why didn't you tell me about having made a girlfriend?!"

Seeing the difficulty in her opponent she turned her anger towards me.

"That... I'm sorry."

I naturally apologized.

Masuzu suddenly joined in:

"Oh my, being together with Eita-kun requires the permission of Harusaki-san?"

"Damn right! I've spent so much time with Ei-kun, we grew up like brother and sister! Some random girl who's just been getting to know Ei-kun for two months, who do you think knows more about him?!"

"Then what does Harusaki-san know about Ei-kun?"

"I know everything about Ei-kun! Just like how in grade 3 he put milk in the school lockers intentionally letting it go bad, like how he called our class teacher Yoshioka 'mama', and also in that marathon after stepping on some poop he was called the 'poopy bulldozer', absolutely everything about him!"

"My, my, now I know more about such fascinating events."

Masuzu listened carefully with her eyes shining, even taking notes of Chiwa's blabbering.

I just... have a sudden urge to kill myself.

"Therefore, you must first go through me if you want to date Ei-kun!"

Masuzu held two corners of her skirt and did a little bow, saying elegantly:

"I apologize for not greeting beforehand. I, Natsukawa Masuzu am now dating Kidou Eita-sama. If you would be so kind as to bless us both, we are under your care."

"[...]"

"Eita-kun, let's continue our date, shall we?"

Natsukawa grabbed my left arm and was just about to leave, when suddenly Chiwa grabbed my right arm.

Chiwa pouted as if a kid losing her toy and glared at Masuzu with hatred.

"Is there something else you want?"

"I don't want it."

"Hmm?"

"A—bsolutely not! I don't want Ei-kun to be with someone like you!"

My right arm was being tugged over, with a seemingly high chance of being ripped off.

"Owowowow! Chiwa, let go!"

"Then I shall accept your challenge. I dare you to come put out the blazing love between us."

"Like I said— Oww!"

This is such a tragedy.

Neither Chiwa nor Masuzu gave away. The two of them pulled from my both sides, just like a tug-of-war.

"Look, Eita-kun is already crying out in pain. As a caring childhood friend, why don't you let go of him?"

"No, you should be concerned about your boyfriend and let go of him!"

Eventually, Masuzu could not defeat the kendo trained arms of Chiwa. Masuzu lost balance and pushed me over. Like so, I tripped over some obstacle on the pavement.

"Ahhhhh—!"

I went head first into a pile of garbage, while Chiwa and Masuzu, who had let go beforehand, were completely safe and sound.

That's too cunning. Tears and pain are always of the man.

"Huh—! So what if you're in love?! I'll find my own handsome boyfriend! I'll definitely become popular!"

Like a kid who had just lost a game and could only make verbal threats, Chiwa disappeared after saying this sentence.

Masuzu beamed her angel-like smile, watching me piled in garbage from above.

"Hohoho, Eita-kun is quite popular."

I don't want to care about any of you!

◆

That night Chiwa didn't come for dinner. So much for making her favorite hamburgers.

I sent her a text and quickly received a reply with only one word.

"Traitor."

Traitor, hooray...

Post-Chapter Extra

Kidou Eita.

First-year high school student. Real dull. Personality of a tsukkomi.

Most favorite motto is 'Where there's a will there's a way'.

#4: Newly Formed Club is Mayhem

#4 新しい部を結成して修羅場

Chapter

Three days after all the commotion.

Ever since that day, Chiwa had never come over to my house for dinner. How would she solve her own food problems? Eat bentos from the convenience store? Or cooked food from the supermarket? Chihuahua-chan must have been craving for her favorite kinds of meat.

I was a little...

Because I was… a little bit worried, I sent dinner to her.

Since I figured she would not accept it if I brought it to her in person, I left the lunch box on the front porch bench of her house.

The next morning:

There was a message returned to me, attached to: The empty lunch box.

'Not enough meat.'

...Even though she trampled my generous (?) heart…

But it seemed like she had cooled down.

I had started to think that there weren't any problems anymore. Yet unexpectedly at lunch break—

"Does Eita know? The new rumors about Chihuahua-chan?"

As I was eating in the classroom, Kaoru began.

"What? Has she been called to the staff room again?"

"No... According to the students in class five, they said she was acting very strange."

She was usually kind of weird.

"Specifically how strange?"

"She ran in late for school with a slice of bread in her mouth."

"Ah?"

What's with that?

"Also, when she speaks, she adds 'nya'[36] to the end of all her sentences."

"...To high school students, this was too shocking."

No, even to middle school students, it would also be a shocking behavior.

Even in anime or games, such characters with such a rough personality 'do not exist'—Saeko-san, certainly said say that.

"And she also came to school wearing oversized ribbons like something that an heroine from a kiddy anime would use, and ultra-thick makeup like those worn by kabuki actors. She made the teacher very angry."

Disregard the ribbon... she put on makeup?

These acts were nothing like the things the old Chiwa would do.

"Does Eita have any idea why she’s acting like this?"

"…I have."

Of course.

She probably wanted to become 'popular', so she tried to take the advice gained from her shoujo manga.

Yet, regardless of how you thought about it, it must have been a huge fuss.

"You should quickly think of something to do, right?"

"Eh, w-why me?"

"Because Eita was the one who caused it?"

"...It's not..."

I couldn’t deny it.

Kaoru looked calmly around the classroom, then whispered:

"I never thought Eita and the famed Natsukawa-san would start going out. I was also very surprised."

Masuzu was not in the classroom.

Every lunch break, I never knew where she always ran off to.

"In any case, I think it’s even more important that you deal with Chihuahua-chan properly."

"You talk as if there’s something between Chiwa and me."

Even in middle school, there had been people who suspected there was some relationship between the two of us.

However, I thought Kaoru had always understood.

Chiwa and I were not in that kind of relationship.

"Regardless of whether the two of you have a relationship or not, in short—"

Kaoru had a serious expression and said:

"Chihuahua-chan is, for the current Eita, just like real family, right?"

"...Well, that's true."

Right now my only family was Saeko-san.

But— I guess Chiwa can also be considered.

We eat together every day.

If you compared her to Saeko-san, who was never at home and always working, perhaps Chiwa was even more like 'family'.

"If that’s the case, at least you can't say that you are not related to this, right?"

"Ah, uh..."

To be frank, I had wanted to forget about this matter and wait until the wind blew it my way again.

Because if I cared, wouldn’t that make it as if I was getting popular?

Moreover, this was fundamentally the route to mayhem!

On the surface, everything might indeed look like that... but that isn't simply how it is.

The relationship between Masuzu and me was 'fake'. As for Chiwa, she was acting rashly because of nothing.

"Well, good luck , *Ei-kun*."

After eating lunch, Kaoru patted me on the shoulder and left. He seemed to be busy with some work as the student council secretary.

Three other secretary girls came to the classroom door to greet him, and the boys in the class even whistled to tease them.

Despite this, Kaoru still looked 'indifferent', yet the three girls were as red as apples.

I heard that girls liked Kaoru.

Even though he wasn’t at the level of Masuzu, Kaoru was still very popular.

Ever since middle school, such rumors had been never-ending.

For some reason, no one has ever heard of him going out with anyone…

Does he like anyone?

"...It can’t be Chiwa, right?"

I suddenly blurted out what I was thinking in my heart.

Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong.

No, no, no, no.

How could Kaoru possibly like Chiwa?

◆

After that, it soon came to that time of the day.

It was that wonderfully happy time that Natsukawa Masuzu-san and I happened to spend together.

Wow—

I am, so, overjoyed—

...Ah.

In short, please take a look at this first:

"Hey, Masuzu—"

"I *refuse*."

She answered immediately.

I haven't even said anything yet.

"'Hey, Masuzu, can I just at least tell Chiwa that we're 'Fake'? ' Something along these lines, right?"

"Ah… Right."

This person was very frightening.

Could she read my mind?

"Kind-hearted Eita-kun was thinking such things, right? I understand. Because Harusaki-san was acting strangely today, you feel responsible?"

"Sort of."

It seemed that Chiwa’s behavior had even reached the ears of Masuzu.

"What would you do if Harusaki-san revealed it to everyone? If the fake aspect is revealed, the 'wall'[37] will be no use."

"I'll tell her she has to keep the secret."

"No. 'Listen, this is a secret, but...' or 'While this is a secret, in fact, ah...' like this one becomes ten, ten becomes one hundred, and the secret is no longer a secret. This is the enemy of all secrets."

"[...]"

I had nothing to say. She made a sound argument.

"Sorry, I was wrong."

"Such a sincere way to apologize, I like that."

niko[38], Masuzu's face smiled.

With this illegally wonderful smile, just how many men have been plunged to hell…?

"Then I'll have to think of some other way to get her back on track."

"Ah, although we’re limited in capacity, I'll gladly help."

Since school ended, many students stared at us from the side of their eyes. Like always, we were very conspicuous.

Although I was inexplicably restless, Masuzu calmly walked in plain sight of many people.

The worlds we lived in were entirely different.

"In any event the main point seems to be that – Harusaki-san is acting like this because she 'wants to be popular', right?"

"Probably."

"Then, does Harusaki-san has someone she likes?"

"No, I don't think so."

I never heard her mention anyone in either her grade, or any senior she thought was handsome.

"Really?"

Masuzu examined my face carefully.

Her eyes were filled with skepticism.

"To lie on that, why would that bring me any type of benefit? Chiwa and me have known each other since we were little, yet I've never heard her talk about any boy in that way."

"No, I don't mean it in that way."

"Then what do you mean?"

"Nothing?"

Masuzu shrugged:

"For Eita-kun to be so clueless about it, that's actually pretty fortunate."

"...What, what?"

She was deliberately making it complicated.

"So: 'Even though she doesn't have anyone she likes, yet still wanting to be popular...'"

Masuzu nodded and said:

"That is, in other words, to be a bitch[39]."

"Don't say 'Bitch'!"

This woman...

How could she call someone else's childhood friend that!

"Basically, as long as Harusaki-san gets a boyfriend, she'll naturally settle down... Shouldn't that be a sure thing?"

"It should be."

Let her find a boyfriend...

It was really hard to imagine the scene.

"We‘ll help her find one."

"What, 'help her find', do you mean...? Ah..."

She didn’t mean 'prepare' instant ramen[40].

"I’ll come up with something by tomorrow. Tomorrow, after school, bring Harusaki-san and look for me."

Masuzu looked pretty confident.

"Hey, what are you plotting?"

"I’m thinking about it right now. You’ll just have to wait for tomorrow. Fufufufufu."

Masuzu replied while laughing giggling.

...What are you going to do?

◆

Thus, the next day after school—

"*wan*[41] *gaugaugau*[42] *wooofwooof*"

"Ouch, ouch, ouch, ouch, that hurts! Don’t bite me! Don’t pinch me! Don’t grab me!"

Chiwa had bitten my sleeve with her large mouth.

She also pinched my cheeks, and grasped my arm.

In short, I brought Chiwa to the room Masuzu specified.

"What do you want, nya?! Why did you take me to this place, nya?! You always leave me alone. Why don’t the two of you go home, nya?!"

Masuzu appeared with a fearful smile:

"Fufufu, I don’t know whether you're a dog or a cat anymore."

"No, I’m a human..."

I feel a little uneasy.

Is it really okay to bring Chiwa here?

This was the third floor of the school, the east wing, where cultural societies generally met. At the southern end, there was a huge five-meter square empty room.

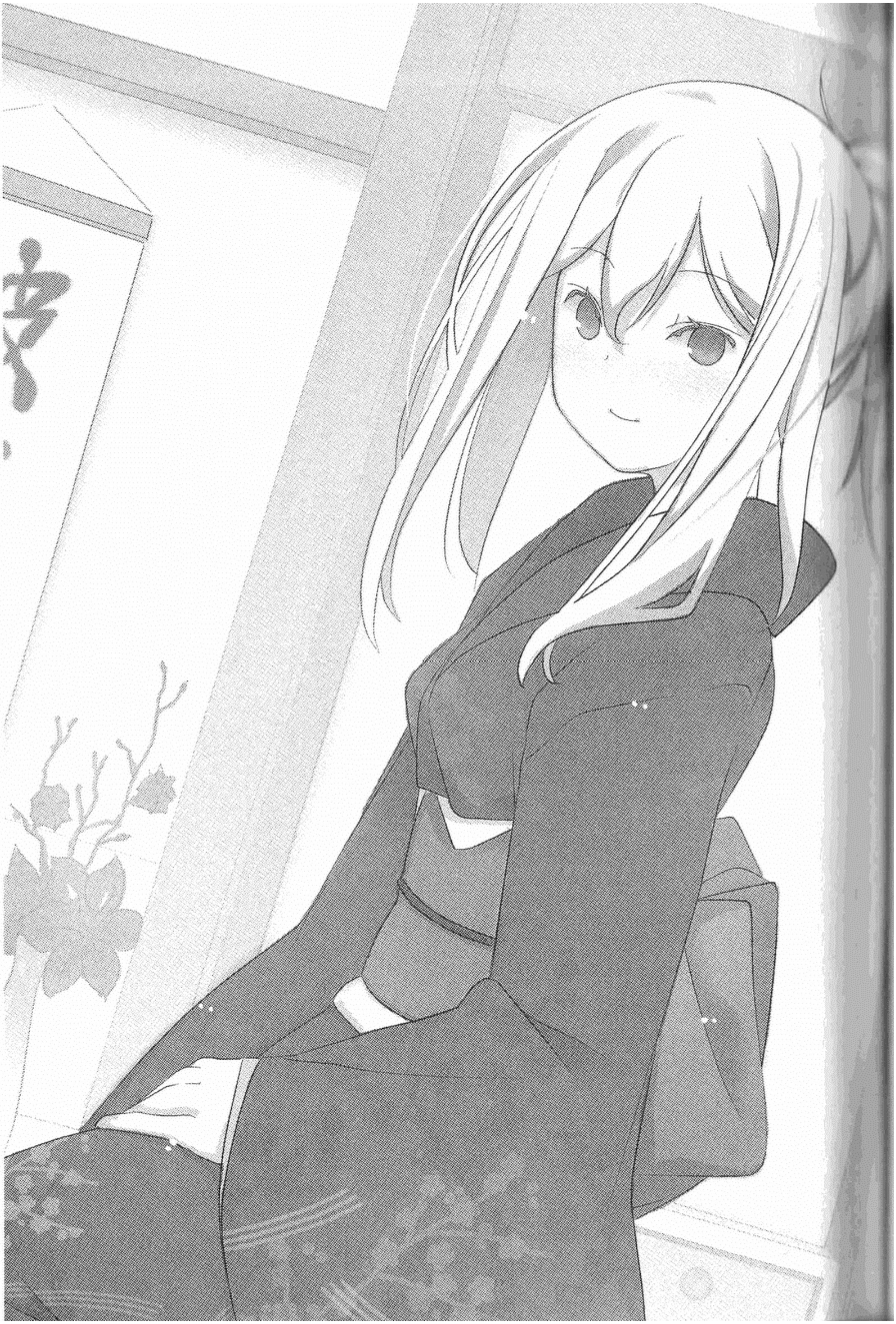
The inside was completely empty, except for a table and chairs. One corner was covered with four tatami mats, which looked like traditional Japanese-Style tatami seats, but really weird.

Masuzu was kneeling upright on a tatami in the corner.

Somehow, in front of her was a set of four calligraphy treasures[43].

"Welcome, Harusaki Chiwa-san."

When and where did she change her clothes? Masuzu was wearing a red kimono which was decorated with bright eye-catching embroidery. Her silvery hair was tied up, exposing her delicate neck. This outfit truly revealed her charm, and the kimono was very well-suited. Even I, who was always around Masuzu, wanted to let out a sigh of admiration. If other boys saw her, the number of Masuzu’s fans would surely increase.



"What’s going on, nya? I'm busy, nya—"

"Today, in order to persuade Harusaki-san to join our club, we brought you here."

"Club?"

Chiwa and me asked with one voice.

"Hey, you’ve never told me this! Masuzu, what’s going on?"

"Aren’t you in the go-home club, nya? What club are you talking about, nya?!"

"I heard Harusaki-san was recently trying hard to become popular with the boys. It is said that you’ve been sounding like a female cat in estrus, because it was part of your strategy to become more popular."

"Who are you calling a female cat, nya?!"

"It looks like it didn’t have much of an effect."

"T-The effects will slowly begin to appear, nya!"

In my opinion, even if a thousand years had passed, the effects would not appear.

"Harusaki-san."

Masuzu coldly started at Chiwa.

"Please recognize reality."

"W-What...? Nya."

"You’re short, with a baby face, your upper and lower body are tiny… In short: You have the appearance of a child."

"You’ve said too much. Nya!"

"Your brain has the maturity of a childish adult toy."

"I understand what you mean, nya!"

"In short, regardless of your appearance or behavior, you simply are too naïve. If you go on like this, even after a million years, you won’t be able find a boyfriend, never mind the dream of becoming popular remaining just a dream."

"Even then, so what? Nya!"

"Although it makes me feel strange to be the one saying it..."

Coughing, Masuzu cleared her throat.

"I am *exceedingly* popular."

"[...]"

"I am popular. The popularity even bears more popularity, and it's so much that it's to the extent that I'm fed up with it, but there’s no way for me to stop attracting the gentlemen."

Chiwa was so surprised that she forgot to be angry. She was just dumbstruck, with her mouth open.

"Nevertheless, I wasn’t always like this."

"Huh...?"

I couldn’t help mumbling.

Masuzu went also through an unpopular phase?

"I also tried and was defeated in various attempts and efforts… Anyways, the most important thing that led to my success was the presence of *this*."

Masuzu spoke as she pulled from the schoolbag next to her a B5-size notebook.

That's strange?

Why do I feel like the cover looks familiar?

Particularly, that path of stains... Is this a déjà vu?

I remember the time I overturned a cola drink, and caused a stain—

Hahaha.

Ahhahahahaaahhh.

"Hey, you, Masuzuuuuuuuuuu————."

"Thanks to this notebook, I became popular."

"What are you thinking of doing with thaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?"

"Ei-kun, you're noisy! What were you saying? Is it really thanks to that notebook?"

Because she was so excited, Chiwa forgot to add a 'nya' at the end of her sentences. She leaned out and stared at the cover of the notebook… Almost as if she had been completely seduced by an exaggerated advertising campaign that swindled people.

"This notebook was something my 'first love' gave me as a memento. How to be an attractive person? How do you attract the opposite sex? He recorded all of those doctrines under the appearance of a diary. Our club will use this notebook as our guidebook, for the research and study of how to become popular."

"W-What happened to your first love?"

"In March of this year, he left a message that said: 'Our battle is starting!', he then left to the local convenience store, never returning."

Masuzu covered her face with her kimono sleeves and sniffled as if crying.

Is this person an idiot?

Who would actually believe this obviously vain and rotten story, and then cry—

"Ah, ah, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to ask! I'm really sorry!"

"[...]"

Yes, there she was, Chihuahua-chan.

Even if you were so thickheaded, I couldn't hate you[44] .

"If there is someone unpopular suffering in front of me – 'You must save them' – He would surely say. Even more so, since you are Eita-kun's childhood friend. I couldn't just sit idly by, so I created this club."

"Eeehhhh?"

Chiwa timidly recoiled backwards.

"I’m begging you, Harusaki-san. Please let the lowly me help you become super popular!"

Masuzu’s expression looked very realistic despite the acting, and she stared pleadingly at Chiwa.

Chiwa looked away.

"I understand what you are saying, but in this situation I can't simply say 'then, I'll be under your care', you can realize that, right?"

Mhm, that was well spoken.

A person just listening would smell something very fishy. After all, everything developes way too quickly.

As expected, it seems like Chiwa wasn’t foolish to that extent.

"Then, will you run away?"

The fake crying suddenly stopped.

A provocative smile surfaced on Masuzu’s face.

"I-I wasn’t going to run! This and that are two totally different things—"

"When aiming for victory, one needs to resort to every possible means, right?"

"R-Right!"

"To cling to some boorish pride, then fail, that would be very humiliating, right?"

"[...]"

Chiwa bit her lip, and lowered her head.

This is bad...

This kind of questioning that emphasized the spirit, and a persevering way of life… for Chiwa, who was sporty down to every corner of bone marrow and brain tissue, considered the 'sporty blood type'… this was an extremely effective tactic.

"Hey, Chiwa don’t think about it so seriously, okay? Just keep working hard like you did in the past…"

"Right—"

Masuzu interrupted me:

"Eita-kun will also join the group as an advisor. If Harusaki-san doesn’t join, it will just be the two of us all alone for the club activities —doesn’t this bother you?"

Chiwa’s eyes immediately fired up, 'Boom'!

"I'll do it! And it’s not because of your deceiving words!"

"H-Hey, Chiwa..."

"What, Ei-kun? Do you really want to be alone with this woman that much?!"

"[...]"

According to our school rules, new clubs needed to have at least five members.

To keep a club from disbanding, they should also have at least three members.

In other words, it was impossible for 'Masuzu and I would be alone in club activities'.

But by now, however, I couldn’t open my mouth against Chiwa’s burning and raging eagerness.

...I don’t care, you guys can do whatever you like.

"So it’s decided, then, fufu. The club activities seem like they’ll be very interesting."

clap! Masuzu clapped her hands while smiling.

"And then what? Can we use this as the clubroom? And what’s the name of the club?"

Masuzu picked up the brush next to her in response to Chiwa.

She smoothly wrote on the white hanging scroll several fluent words.

The text she wrote—

"Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self[45]."

It was really like Masuzu’s style. I thought the name had a particularly ojou-sama style, with a very sociable feeling.

"It’s a really good name!"

Chiwa’s eyes lit up as she spoke.

Well, if she likes it, it’s just fine.

——Just when I was thinking this, Masuzu whispered to me:

"Abbreviated, it becomes 'Jien Otsu'[46]. Just kidding♪.

Without a doubt.

Undoubtly—

This girl, is a Demon.

Post-Chapter Extra

From the 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self' application form:

Aspirations of each member:

Masuzu: "In order to improve myself, and familiarize myself with Hanenoyama High School’s temperament."

Instructor: "Good luck on becoming a young maiden."

Chiwa: "I absolutely, *absolutely* have to become more popular than Natsukawa!"

Instructor: "You should give up on the hatred first."

Eita: "Let me say a few things. Survival is difficult. I hope to save the lives of others. I will never give up. Teya—!"

Instructor: "I could see the enthusiasm of Kido-kun in that last 'Teya—'! Good luck!"

#5: Light Music is Mayhem

#5 けいおんがくで修羅場

The next day, during lunch break time.

While eating lunch, I narrated in great detail what happened yesterday. Kaoru stared with his eyes wide open.

"Oh, that’s really an unexpected development."

Kaoru was right.

The fact that I got a girlfriend was a ridiculously abnormal event.

Yet I would've never thought that I, famous for always going home after school, would be attending club activities…

"Do you know who the advisor is? If there isn't one, it isn't possible to do any club activities, right?"

“She’s the Classical lesson's teacher Itotani[47]-sensei. Last year she was the instructor of the tea ceremony club, but after the third-years graduated, the club was shut down. We heard she wasn’t very busy, and it worked out that our club could take over the tea ceremony club."

"Then how did you explain the club activities to the teacher?"

"For the purpose of re-discovering the true appearance of the Japanese maiden, to transform Hanenoyama high school students into dignified, pure, upright, and beautiful girls, learning etiquette or maybe courtesy, etc..."

I had listened to Masuzu explaining this to the teacher, but I was completely bewildered.

Well, forget it. It was just a spectacle of words.

"Our club activities will have the purpose of making us popular and pleasing everyone, fuhuhuhu~tehe☆ ", Now that certainly wasn’t a proper thing to say.

Besides, there was also a more important unresolved issue: Whether my notebook would be leaked to Chiwa or not.

I later asked Masuzu why she had to bring in all this nonsense—

'No special reason. It's just more interesting that way.'

'This diary is full of *very* interesting subjects... I can clearly sense Eita’s extraordinary talent.'

'But do not worry, I will neither disclose the contents of the diary to Harusaki-san, nor will I let her know that this is in fact your personal diary.'

'I promise you, in case this should ever happen, I will lift you from your role of 'boyfriend'.'

Well, since she said so, there was no harm in believing that for now.

But it was impossible to get rid of the lingering unease.

"Having said that, Natsukawa-san’s initiative is really amazing, yeah."

"Yeah, I was actually surprised."

In fact, in merely one day spent she found an advisor, applied and settled a club, furthermore she dragged Chiwa into the group. I didn’t expect such power from an ojou-sama.

Incidentally, Masuzu still wasn't in the classroom yet, and I hadn’t heard that she would go to the student cafeteria... So, where was she eating lunch?

"Oh, right, what about Chihuahua-chan[48]?"

"It looks as if she is truly burning with fighting spirit..."

Even though it seemed like we hadn’t spoken in ages, Chiwa had come over last night for dinner.

The dish was ginger roast pork, and she continuously refilled her rice bowl three times.

"Even though it's really irritating to be lectured by that woman, I also got to hear something good."

"I want to steal the secret, I want to be more popular than Natsukawa... I will absolutely show you!"

Chiwa splattered rice while talking excitedly, looking very happy.

It was probably that:

Ever since she had been unable to practice Kendo, I think she had too much energy waiting to be spent.

Moreover, she often said she was 'looking for new things to get into'.

Hehe.

"Doesn't Eita somehow look extremely pleased right now?"

"Don’t say stupid things. She forced me to reduce my study time and I find it very troubling."

However, the expression on my face had answered differently.

In fact, Kaoru was completely right. I was a little bit... happy.

Yet, it's not because I was taking part in a new club.

Rather, watching Chiwa repeatedly try her hardest —It didn’t feel bad.

"Having said that, being sandwiched in between two girls is very hard, too." Kaoru said with a wry smile.

"Yeah, only you can understand me."

"Of course, because we’re best friends."

This kind of empathetic feeling is something I also want to reach with my 'girlfriend' and 'childhood friend'.

I eagerly look forward to it!

◆

After school—

There was a hanging-scroll written in calligraphy by Masuzu hanging in front of the clubroom door.

Our Jien-Otsu Club was finally ready to start activities.

"Harusaki-san, are you ready?", Masuzu asked.

Masuzu was wearing snowy white clothes as a cloak, which she mysteriously obtained from who knows where, with one hand holding my notebook, looking as if she was a teacher. This kind of dress was utterly well-suited for her. As expected, beauties could do things like that.

"Young maidens' self-recreation, let's start!"

Chiwa muttered with discontent, but nevertheless knelt onto a seat cushion. Like a true experienced kendo practitioner, her back was diligently straight, and her posture was excellent.

I followed and sat cross-legged on a folding chair, not far from the two girls.

"To start, let's agree on a goal."

"Goal?"

"First, we target the person you want as your boyfriend. To put it simply, 'who do you want to take down[49]'?"

"Becoming popular without that... isn't possible?"

"I believe setting a goal will make it easier to obtain results from the training."

"...But even if you want me to suddenly pick someone..."

She said, then Chiwa briefly glanced towards me.

What is it?

Is she going to ask for my advice about it?

"That’s right, it’s a rather good thing to have a goal. Well, do you have anyone you're troubled by?"

"Ah… How could I have… uh?"

Chiwa bowed her head.

Ehhhhh…

She doesn’t like any boy in particular, yet she still wants to be popular?

This totally exhausts the point of having a goal.

"Don’t think too hard, it’s alright to start with those you think of as friends."

Chiwa bent her head down for a while and said,

"Well..."

She then looked up and continued,

"...Sakata from Men's Basketball? He’s a senior. I always hear the girls in our class discussing how handsome he is."

Sakata?

Does the men's basketball club have a senpai with that name?

"Do you mean Sakagami-senpai? The third-year?"

"Ah, r-right, that’s him."

So it turned out to be that senior?

If it’s really him, even I know his background. He’s going to participate in the High School Inter-High Sports Competition, and he’s the ace of Hanenoyama High School’s basketball team. He is very tall, good-looking, and is definitely considered 'the' *popular' male senior.*

"But he's practically an unattainable flower, isn't that a problem?"

"Yeah, I definitely... don’t recommend him.", Masuzu said, vaguely.

I was a bit surprised.

I thought she would say, 'ambitious goals' would be very good”.

"...No wait, actually this is very convenient."

She went on as if putting aside her earlier hesitation. She wildly nodded and said: "Sakagami’s younger brother is in our class. It might be easier to use him to introduce yourself."

"Maybe you can even get him to tell his brother that there is 'a very cute girl' in his class."

Even after all the trouble of finally picking a target, Chiwa’s expression still looked particularly unhappy.

"...Well, I guess I can settle for the Sakashita-senpai as a goal."

"You mean Sakagami, right?"

"Ah, right, it’s Sakagami-senpai."

How did her enthusiasm suddenly disappear?

Just yesterday, she was so vigorously spirited.

"Well, since we’ve agreed on a goal —we’ll begin the first day of the lecture."

Masuzu stood in front of a whiteboard (which she got from who knows where), and said:

"First we’ll read aloud 'his' diary, so please pay attention and listen."

Huh?

I couldn’t help but be taken aback... Yet, Masuzu’s eyes glanced at me with a smile and told me 'don't you worry'.

…Well, I’ll believe you for now.

May 28th - Clear

I want to introduce my partners – my guitar and Western music, as well as the rhythm of the soul.

Today, I carried my partners out with me.

They are me. Regardless of the time, I can neither let go, pass them away, nor substitute them with false avatars.

It is the 'GUITAR'[50]! It's engraved as my soul partner.

When I carry the guitar, I look precisely like an artist.

The eyes of people passing on the street look at me differently.

That’s because they see an artist's eyes - looking forward to only what's in front of him.

Exposed to this ardent gaze, my partner and I become burning fire, hot, hot.

But my expression has always been 'KOOL'[51].

Because— no, it’s not like that.

KOOL face × *HAT soul*[52] = ∞

If it’s not like that, you can’t make real music—

C'mon, today we’re opening the prelude of a live performance!

Let the dispirited school —heat up now!

"Ku— oooooooooooouuuu—"

This is...

T-This is sooo...

Masuzu really did follow our agreement, as she had made subtle changes, deleting specific terms, so one couldn’t tell that I wrote that diary.

She did it very well, and I wanted to praise her.

B-But...

But…

Aaaaaaaaaggghhhhhhhhhh…

"Hey, hey, Ei-kun! Are you okay?"

I found Chiwa shaking my shoulder.

"Yeah, I’m fine, Chiwa, haha, what’s wrong? You look so surprised."

"Because you suddenly started banging your head on the wall! Eh! You… You’re bleeding!"

Chiwa quickly took out a red disinfectant fluid and a gauze from her bag. It seems she had developed a habit of carrying first-aid since participating in the kendo club. She was very experienced and skilled with treating injuries.

“Would Ei-kun like to go to the infirmary?"

Masuzu was also surprisingly caring.

—Oh wait, wasn’t she the one guilty for this?!

Damn...

I never imagined that reading the notebook in front of others would have such great destructive power.

It really exceeded my expectations.

Maybe it really will affect my life.

I have to hurry and make Chiwa popular, and then stop the club activities, otherwise...

"S-Sorry, I'm fine! We can keep going."

Masuzu nodded, and stood again in front of the whiteboard.

"The point of this diary entry is – 'people who are in a band, are popular'! In particular: The guitar. In fact, ninety-seven percent of high school boys who start to learn playing guitar do so to become 'popular'. The investigation data is very clear; in other words: The guitar has a very good effect on popularity. Of course, this also applies to high school girls."

Although Masuzu calmly sneaked in some false rumors, I have to agree that her claims might had some truth to it even though she inverted the reasoning.

People who played in bands were really popular. But was this because 'bands make people popular' or just because 'popular people play in bands'? Which of these, I am not quite sure.

"But what if I can't play the guitar?"

"Then what can you play?"

Chiwa tilted her head to the side and said:

"Ehhh... the shinai?"

"The shinai is not a musical instrument."

"Eh? But they make a sound when you are hit by them."

"What kind of pitch is that?"

"Face hit ♪ Face hit ♪[53]."

"How can you say that so casually?!"

Masuzu tapped her baton on the whiteboard and said:

"It's alright even if you can’t play."

"Eh?"

"You just have to look as if you know how to play. You’ll have no chance to perform during school anyways. "

"That’s right..."

"For a while, the 'air guitar'[54] was really fashionable, right? That’s the best evidence that if you want to be popular, you don’t actually need to be able to make music."

Masuzu pulled out a guitar case from behind the whiteboard.

It was a huge, hard, black-colored case.

"Here, this is for you."

Chiwa took the box, flipped it around and rolled her eyes.

"There’s no guitar in here?"

Masuzu shrugged, as if to mean 'What is this child saying?' with her body language. She asked: "If we put it in, wouldn’t it be too heavy?"

"[...]"

"Please carry this case with you. As a guitar player would say, a guitar is the equivalent of one’s own body, right, Eita-kun?"

"S-Sure."

In the notebook, it was written like that.

Though in reality, I knew nothing about the guitar.

My diary entry was entirely based on the idea, 'If I could play the guitar'. You could say it was a type of psychological preparation or vision for the future... or well… maybe a kind of ideal dream narrative.

Ugh.

No...

"Waaahhhhhhhh! If you jump from that window, you’ll be killed!"

"What's wrong with you?! Calm down, Ei-kun!"

I finally gave up on the idea of suicide with Chiwa’s attempts to calm me.

Masuzu cleared her throat and said:

"If anyone wants to touch this case, just angrily rebuke them, 'Do not defile my soul!' or 'Let go with your dirty hands!', characteristic irritability is a distinctive trait of a guitarist."

That was a seriously prejudiced stereotype.

"But the inside's empty, right?"

"Well, if you put a guitar in, won’t it be too heavy?"

"[...]"

Chiwa wore an indescribable expression on her face, while staring at the case.

"Also, you have to completely belittle traditional Japanese music."

"W-Why is that?"

"This is the predisposition of the guitarist. Listeners to traditional music are scum, trash, dirty bugs! You need to have this kind of mental preparation, especially while listening to Johnny or AK[55]. The moment you hear this kind of music, it lets your ears rot, acknowledge that."

Huh?

Does Masuzu really have an irreconcilable hatred of traditional Japanese music?

"Will this really make me popular?"

Chiwa said, wrinkling her eyebrows.

It seemed like she finally began to feel suspicious.

"Of course, 'his' notes are more perfect than the Bible."

Even faced with doubtful questions, Masuzu was unwavering.

"Hatred of traditional music and love of Western music is an unconditional requirement for a guitarist."

"I've never listened to Western music, and I don't know any singers."

"Not singers. They're called 'artists'[56]."

Masuzu carefully corrected the details.

"Don't worry, if someone asks which artists you like, just pick a name from the Stands of Jojo's Bizarre Adventures Part IV, as famously recorded in the notebook."

"[...]"

Please forgive me, Araki Hirohiko-Sensei[57].

"Oh... By the way, what's 'JoJo'?"

"Ehh?!"

Masuzu stared at Chiwa with a stunned expression.

"You're saying you do not know of JoJo's Bizarre Adventure?"

"Nope. Does it have something to do with a Yakiniku Shop?"

"[...]"

Masuzu sighed deeply.

Does this mean that, despite her appearance, she loves shounen manga just like how Chiwa likes shoujo manga?

"I finally know the reason why you are unpopular, Harusaki Chiwa. Someone who doesn't know Jojo is at the same level as the Peking Man[58]."

"D-Don't say stupid stuff! I’m a fully-fledged Japanese!"

No, you should be throwing a tsukkomi to the 'primitive man' part[59].

"If you wish to claim that you’re a Japanese person living in the modern era, please finish reading JoJo first. Popular or not, this is where it starts."

"JoJo turned out to be such an important factor..."

Chiwa dejectedly hung her head.

But only for a few seconds.

"I know, I’ll stop by at the bookstore and buy them on my way home!"

Her hair abruptly flicked up as she lifted her head, her pupils flaring up again with excitement.

"Originally, I wanted you to read it all from the beginning of the first part, but since we are actually concerned with the fourth part, get volumes 29 to 47. A single volume costs 410 yen, so altogether it's a total of 7790 yen."

"That’s so expensive! I've only get a 5000 yen allowance every month!"

"Please understand the point. In order to be popular, one surely will need money."

"Really, this so-called love... It depends on how much money..."

Chiwa's eyes had a faraway look.

Yareyare...

"Don’t worry, Chiwa, if it's JoJo I have all volumes, I'll lend them to you."

"T-Thank you, Ei-kun~!"

Chiwa looked exactly like a puppy that had been fed a treat, and excitedly moved closer to me.

"If you really liked what you read, be sure to get your own copy afterwards, okay?"

Masuzu urged her to do so. It was evident that she was a hard-core fan of JoJo.

After that, we talked about the details of the popularity-operation to be carried out the next day.

◆

The next day after school—

"Hey, hey —Ei-kun."

While holding the guitar case, Chiwa came to our classroom.

"Hey —isn't it Chiwa? Why did you bring a guitar with you today?"

"This is, of course, my soul! The guitar is my soul."

Chiwa and I were reciting our lines word-by-word.

As for Masuzu, she sat next to me, completely indifferent to us while writing the day-duty log. If there were any problems, if anything wrong happened, she'd add herself and follow through the situation.

Sakagami-senpai’s little brother sat on the desk three rows in front of the one on my right.

He was chatting with a female friend, which meant he hadn’t gone home yet.

It was a good opportunity.

"That’s strange? Chihuahua-chan can play the guitar?"

The one who spoke out was the leader of a group of girls —Akano Mei[60].

She was said to have a large circle of friends. No matter in which class, boy or girl, she had friends, practically as if she were the embodiment of a popular girl[61].

She and Chiwa should have only been on speaking terms, so the fact she was called by her nickname was a really worthy change.

"Hi, Mei-chan! Yes, I can play the guitar, ahahahha."

"How long have you been playing?"

"H-Gow long, um… I’ve been holding guitar picks since before I drank from milk bottles!"

"Are you part of a band?"

"M-Me… I play on my own! Occasionally, I make solo performances in front of the train station!"

"Amazing, you’re like a street musician?"

"Y-Yeah! Aha! Ahahaha!"

Hey...

Don’t be boastful like that, all right?

Yet, nonetheless, this conversation seemed to be useful. I saw the younger brother of Sakagami glancing from time to time at Chiwa.

We faced Masuzu to the side and noticed that under the table, she had put up an index finger.

That was the signal to continue.

"What kind of music do you normally listen to?”

One of Akano’s friends — Aoba Satsuki[62] added the topic.

The two girls were the social core of our class, commonly known as the 'Red-Green combo'[63].

"U-huh, like reddo hotto chiri Pepper. There’s also ba-baddo canpany and such, right?[64]"

Even though she stumbled about slowly, Chiwa still answered with the proper names of the bands.

Evidently, she had completely read all of Part IV the night before.

"'Red Hot'... What’s that?"

"You don’t know it? They’re a very famous American band."

Akano blinked with awe towards Aoba, willing to lend an explanation.

It seemed that Aoba was an 'I know it' type.

"Harusaki-san, do you like 'Rechili'?"

"Assorted puffer-fish hot pot? I’ve eaten it when I traveled with my family in Kyuushuu, but I prefer pork shabu-shabu."

Hey, idiot Chiwa!

You should just think about the context! 'Rechili' is an abbreviation of 'Red Hot Chili Peppers'!

"Ahhh, sorry, Harusaki-san doesn’t like this abbreviation, right?"

"Huh?"

“Old fans all abbreviate 'RHCP' or 'Chili Peppers', my father said so."

Chiwa looked as if she finally understood.

"Ahhh! Uh, I am an old fan of theirs! I am an 'Old Type'!"

It seemed that Chiwa wouldn't be able to use Funnels[65].

"Well, since you’re a fan of the 'Chilipeppers', your guitar should also be a 'Strat', right?"

"Huh?"

"Frusciante is really handsome! It’s too bad he left the band."

“F-Fruscian—? Then whose stand is that?”

“Stand?"

This conversation isn’t working.

Even though I would have very much liked to help her, I have almost no knowledge of Western music. Even I just learned that 'Red Hot Chili Pepper*S*' had been their correct name moments ago.

Faced with this kind of situation, I gave a sidelong glance towards Masuzu.

"Ahhhh... the clouds are red like blood, the gods of twilight are near."

Masuzu leaned on the desk with her hand supporting her cheek, as if she became a poet who lazily gazed out of the window.

It was as if everything had nothing to do with her.

I've never seen such a hideous person!

"Let me see your guitar."

Akano said this decisive sentence.

"N-No! This is my soul! I can’t just let other people casually look at it!"

Chiwa protectively shifted her (empty) guitar case behind her.

"Huh? Why not, just let me look at your precious 'Strat'."

"You should play a little for us, then! Even a little bit would be great!"

This was the limit.

"Come on Chiwa! It’s about time for you to go to your live concert, right?"

I wanted to help her, but—

"Yeah, I want to see it too!"

At this point, Sakagami’s brother chimed in.

"My brother's hobby is collecting old guitars. His room is full of guitars. Maybe Harusaki would be able to get along with him."

Exactly like his brother, he has a handsome face. He approached Chiwa.

Finally backed into a corner, Chiwa trembled all over and clung to the guitar case.

I profoundly noticed how short her body was.

Carrying a large guitar case made her little body seem especially short; after all, Chihuahua was her nickname for a reason.

Yet, her physique was clearly very strong.

Female high school students generally couldn't even compare with her. After eight years of Kendo experience, the results were not just skin deep.

With this, Chiwa stammered:

"O-O-OOOO-O-k-Okay? I-I-IIII-I'll let you see..."

She grabbed the neck of the guitar case, and raised it up as if it were a shinai.

"DORAA!"

Chiwa issued a roar from the depths of her stomach:

"DORARARARARARARARARARARARA[66]!"

She was like a crazy destructive guitarist at a live performance, and soon after, began waving the guitar case!

"DORARARARARARARARARARARA!"

Sakagami's little brother was dumbfounded, and stared blankly.

Everyone in the class held their breath, or were petrified while staring at Chiwa's disheveled hair and destructive actions. Luckily, her arms were very short, so she didn't cause any damage to anything around her.

"Uuuf— DORA—!"

Finally, she gave one last epic finishing cry, reminiscent of her glorious days in the kendo club.

The classroom was absolutely silent.

"Ro-Rokkun Ro-ru-[67]! Sankyuu! I love you!"

Chiwa's face was stiff with a grin as she waved vigorously to the audience.

That was the end of the live performance.

"...I'm done!"

Chiwa again grabbed her guitar case, and fled like a rabbit from the classroom.

No one tried to run after her.

We all remained motionless.

And didn't even speak a word.

In this frozen classroom, only one person let out a sound.

Natsukawa Masuzu.

She had buried her face on the desk, her body shaking with vibration.

I was under the impression that she was devastated by the tragic failure, since she was the sponsor of this project. It's what I was expecti—

"Pufufufu, fufufufufu, ufufufufufu, fufufufufufufufufufu—[68]"

She was laughing.

Crying.

Her shoulders quivered.

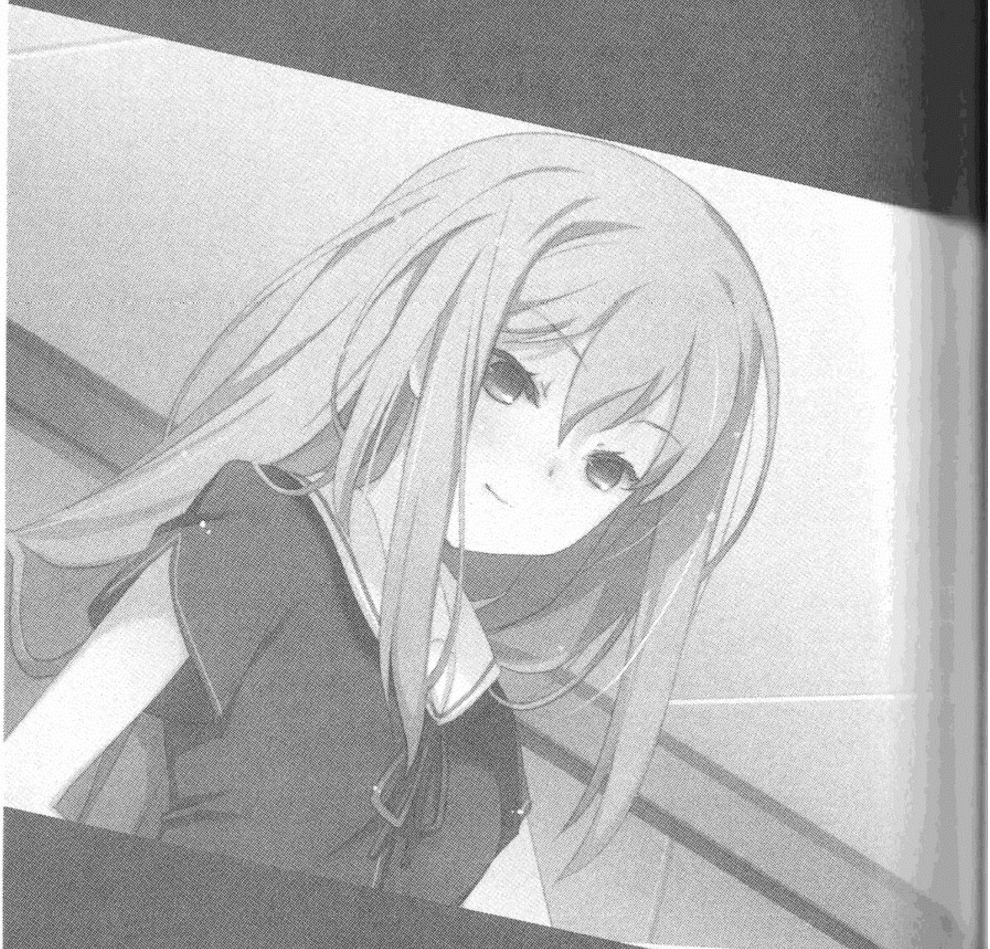
Her entire body bursted out into laughter.

[...]

Certainly, I really have never seen such a hideous person!

#6: The Inside of a Skirt is Mayhem

#6 スカートの中は修羅場



Chapter

This piece of news instantly circulated around school.

They called it, 'Chihuahua's Dorarara ~ Live[69] Performance Event'.

The story of the 'Pitiful Chihuahua' made it to the front page of the newspaper.

The next day after school—

I was curious how the two them felt about yesterday's failure, so I went to the clubroom —Chiwa and Masuzu were already kneeling inside in front of a tea set.

"Well, I guess we could say it was acceptable!"

Chiwa anxiously bit into some Japanese pancakes.

"Yes, from the perspective of 'getting more attention', this could actually be considered a fairly good start, right?"

Masuzu leisurely sipped her tea.

...Not good. Chiwa didn't gain any experience at all.

On the table, there were a thermos bottle, teapot, teacup, as well as refreshments such as Japanese pancakes — everything needed for traditional Japanese-Style afternoon tea was readily available. It seemed like Masuzu brought all the appliances from the staff room.

I put my schoolbag on the table and sat down on one of the folding chairs.

"Anyway, Sakagami's little brother will definitely remember Chiwa's name, but no matter how you look at it, won't she only be associated to a bad image?

"Whether she has a bad reputation or not, it makes no difference. If he can't remember her name first, there's no opportunity to start."

"Is that so?"

"The opposite of love is not hate, but indifference; all relationships of boyfriend and girlfriend start from some kind of emotional connection."

"Ah..."

Well, if it’s phrased that way, it’s certainly not *wrong*.

"Even so, Chiwa really was too rough and overdid it. She even took the guitar case and swung it around strenuously."

"Really? I thought it was nothing."

Chiwa said this while nibbling and chewing on her Japanese pancakes, her head tilted to the side.

"If you would injure yourself again, like you did before, it'd be really bad... like if your back suddenly started to hurt, what would you do?"

"You really like to worry too much. If you keep that up you’ll go bald!"

"...Even if I go bald, I can just wear a wig. But if your back injury recurs, you won’t be able to walk!"

I subconsciously raised the volume of my voice.

Chiwa stopped eating her Japanese pancakes, and solemnly bowed her head:

"I'm sorry, I was kidding. I got too carried away."

"You… As long as you’ll remember, it’s fine."

"Thank you for worrying about me. I will be careful."

"It's not like I was worrying about you."

"...Hehehe."

I didn’t know why, but Chiwa seemed very happy.

Even after I got angry at her, she was still very happy... Was this one a maso?

Earlier, I interrupted Masuzu for something, but she didn’t react. She just quietly sipped her tea.

"Hey... Natsukawa, can I ask you one thing?"

"What is it, Harusaki-san?"

"Earlier you said, all relationships of boyfriend and girlfriend start from some kind of emotional connection."

"Yes."

"So... What is your emotional connection with Ei-kun? Why did you start dating him?"

I could feel my heart pounding away.

This issue had particularly something to do with my notebook, so I did not want to casually enter the topic.

—*How will you categorically cut this conversation, Masuzu?*

Was what I thought, but Masuzu smiled calmly and said:

"Because he saw my panties[70]."

From the shock, half of the Japanese pancake Chiwa was eating fell into her teacup.

"Uh... What?! What was that?!"

"Eita-kun~ my very own~ panties~ got a clear view of them."

"...Ei-kun?"

Chiwa stared at me with terrifying eyes.

"W-W-Wait! Masuzu! Don’t lie! I didn’t see anything!"

"Thus, the criminal denies the charges.”

"Wait, this again?!"

I definitely did not see them.

I didn’t see!

And that's because the wind blew up her skirt and she wasn’t wearing anything.

Even the other time, when Masuzu flipped her own skirt, she did not reveal that particular area.

"Once a Maiden's undergarments were seen, she can't take any other path than dedicating herself to that gentleman."

Masuzu actually dared to lie so nonchalantly…

In either case, you shouldn’t use that kind of language for an excuse!

"Ah, I see. Something like that happened…"

Even though Chiwa’s tone seemed to grow softer, her eyebrows continued to twitch.

This was a habit of hers when she attempted to repress her anger.

"I j-just said it wasn’t like that! The wind unexpectedly blew up her skirt! I didn’t see anything! Because there wasn’t any underwear to see!"

I desperately tried to defend myself.

I didn’t want Chiwa to think of me as a pervert.

"It’s true, she really wasn’t wearing anything! I’m sure of it! Because in the flashing moment when that gust of wind blew by, I happened to be looking at her skirt! I was locked on her skirt carefully with eyes wide opened, yet, I didn’t see any cloth! If I could see her white glossy smooth thighs, I should have been able to see her panties! Though to be honest, it may have been possible that the wind blew the skirt between her legs… or maybe her panties were tightly stuck in her body! But if… Ugh, wuahhhh!"

Chiwa hit me.

She struck me hard with her fist.

I don’t think she had ever hit me like this since elementary school.

"Y-Y-You… You big pervert!"

"N-No, Chiwa... believe me!"

"Ei-kun actually turned into such a pervert. As your childhood friend, I’m ashamed!"

Tears filled the brim of Chiwa’s eyes.

I had provoked my childhood friend into crying through my perverted behavior (though wrongly accused).

"L-Listen to me... Chiwa... I—"

"I don’t want to! I do not want to hear it! Kneel now, Ei-kun! I want you to kneel there for the rest of the day!”

I obediently got down, with my back straight.

I took off my indoor shoes, and knelt down on the floor directly.

“We won’t talk about Eita-kun’s perverted actions for now. "

Ignoring my plight on the cold and hard floor, Masuzu calmly continued to drink tea.

“Now that I think of it, maybe 'letting him accidentally see them' might be a very effective strategy.”

"Huh?"

"It's kinda regrettable, but as expected, gentlemen are actually always fixated in that particular aspect of women. It's a simple yet highly effective strategy."

"Stop joking! Why would I do such shameless things?"

"This is actually referred to as 'Panchira'."

Masuzu spoke with incredible confidence;

"Panchira is not about 'I'll show it you' but rather about 'It got seen ♪', like something accidentally produced by the direction of the wind."

...Masuzu was such a terrifying tactician.

A natural at Jien-Otsu!

"So what you're saying is, if I actually perform this panchira towards Sakagami-senpai, he'll be taken down[71], groveling at my feet?"

"It doesn't matter if they're handsome or plain or what. Later in the night, he definitely won't be able to fall asleep."

"I guess it's effective... but I feel like it's missing something important."

"Oh, I didn't expect you to be so sensitive about it, Harusaki-san."

"I didn't expect you to be so bold. I heard that you were a dignified ojou-sama, but you're nothing like that."

"Yes, because I am wearing a cat's fur[72]."

Nya ♪, Masuzu gave out a cat sound.

"Whatever, I refuse! It's not like I want to use this kind of strategy anyways."

"You don't have confidence in your underwear? No wonder you haven't been able to find a boyfriend."

"T-The underwear I'm wearing is obviously very cute!"

Well...

Although this is very sudden, I will describe all of our relative positions.

Masuzu and Chiwa were separated by the clubroom table, both in chairs that faced each other.

I'm on my knees, a short distance away from the table, overlooking the conversation between the two girls from the side.

Because I was ordered to kneel on the floor, I could see… both of their legs from under the table.

Their skirts were about twenty centimeters above the knees, since school rules did not allow anything shorter. At this length, the thighs would not be exposed while sitting, not to mention *that* area.

However...

Yes… However…

"Wuuuuuuuuoaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"W-What the—?! What's wrong, Ei-kun?!"

Shocked, Chiwa turned around and looked at me.

"N-N-N-N-Nothing! Nothing! There's nothing wrong!"

"If it's nothing, then be quiet!"

Just, just now...

Only for a split-second, Masuzu lifted her own skirt…

Under the table, I could see a slimmer of brilliant, dazzling white thighs.

I was absolutely sure that this was proof. Masuzu was teasing me, and she definitely let me see them intentionally. She was even sticking her tongue out.

Chiwa did not notice this extraordinary situation and continued to talk with Masuzu.

"Well, aren't there any better combat strategies?"

"Ehh... that would be troubling. After all without using a woman's most powerful weapons?"

Masuzu leaned her right hand on her cheek, and gave off the appearance of being contemplative.

Her left hand grabbed her skirt.

"Woouahauuaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"Didn't I tell you to keep quiet?!"

Chiwa forcibly pounded on the table.

"It's about time you stop, Ei-kun. Would you rather go kneel in the hallway?"

“S-S-Sorry! I-I’ll listen!"

She did it again...

This time, Masuzu clutched the edge of her skirt, and wavered back and forth as if to seduce me with her dangling clothes.

Her plump and full thighs were faintly discernible on the chair.

I unconsciously leaned forward.

That was too shameful!

"Why don't you just let me see that notebook?”

"No, I can’t let you see 'His' final wishes."

"Tsk, you cheapskate!"

"...!"

The third time, I managed to hold back the sound of my surprised cry and restrained myself.

By now, she was in quite a risky position.

It was rather dim underneath the table, so it was difficult to see clearly. But you could just barely make out the perfectly clear white thighs, exposed nearly all the way.

That's strange.

Too strange...

Generally speaking, at that length revealed, at least, one should be able to see the underwear *inside*, right?

But since I can't see it, does that mean she's—!!

I looked up, and realized Masuzu was also looking at me.

This was the so-called 'talking with your eyes'. Masazu's ice-cold eyes seemed to say to me :

—*How is it? Did you see it?*

I stared back at Masuzu, and replied likewise with wide eyes :

—*I didn't see it!*

—*Oh, not enough?*

—*That's not what I'm talking about!*

—*Then, I'll lift it higher then.*

—*Idiot! That would be too bad!*

—*But you said you couldn't see, right?*

—*Even if I couldn't see it, if you kept going, I'd see something totally different!*

"Ei-kun, what are you doing?"

At the sound of Chiwa's voice, I sprang up.

"Wuahh!", I even cried out.

Such disgrace...

"What have you two been doing? You’ve been staring at each other for a while now."

"N-N-N-Nothing!"

"Right, we haven’t been doing anything."

Masuzu calmly smiled and said,

"Mutual lovers will stare at each other; It’s only natural."

"I don’t think so? Ei-kun seems to be shocked with tears in his eyes."

"It must be because he’s not accustomed to kneeling, so he got cramped."

"...Ah, right."

Even though she nodded, Chiwa looked as if she didn’t believe this explanation.

However, Chiwa is Chiwa. She probably hasn't begun to perceive that we weren’t a normal loving couple.

◆

A few minutes later, Chiwa went to the bathroom. I took advantage of this opportunity and violently asked Masuzu:

"W-W-What was with that scene?"

Masuzu put out her checks and in an unusual pouting expression said:

"That's because Eita-kun is still accusing me of 'not wearing any'.

It was rare to see her with a childish expression.

I found myself lost gazing her.

"Still, how could you do that right in front of Chiwa?!"

"But you were very happy, right?"

"I... wasn’t happy! Chiwa would've killed me for that! The anger from before was the real thing!"

"So even our grade’s top-ranking student still gets tamed by his childhood friend."

Masuzu smiled and said:

“Harusaki-san just mentioned something earlier —can I ask about it?"

"What is it?"

"Why are you and Harusaki-san so close to each other?"

"Because she is my childhood friend."

"That’s not the real 'reason', right?"

Masuzu smiled wryly.

"There are many people out there who 'have been friends and lived together since they were little'. Is Harusaki-san the only one you’re still together with?"

"Even if you say something like that..."

Honestly, I can only say it happened naturally

Or was it because I lived very close to her house?

It doesn't matter how much I think about it, a 'reason' seems out of reach.

"It was just like what I said before—"

Masuzu momentarily interrupted me:

"I was a little worried that Harusaki-san will not come to the clubroom, because of the thing that happened yesterday. Maybe she would even start talking about the requirements for withdrawing from a club. I even thought about how to persuade her to stay —but when I came to the clubroom, I saw her already drinking tea seriously. Already looking forward."

"So it was like that, after all..."

The fact that Masuzu thought like that was not at all surprising.

Despite thinking back of yesterday's 'chiri', 'dora', and 'sankyuu'... Chiwa still acted as if nothing had happened, even though she must've presumably been very frustrated last night. If it were me, I would've been depressed for an entire week.

But—

"Chiwa would never give up."

I conclusively said.

"Why?"

"She has never given up anything related to club activities. As long as her goal hadn't been reached, she would never quit."

I simply explained to Masuzu why Chiwa had to quit the kendo club.

One year, near summertime, she was caught in an accident and was forced to abandon her goal.

Even so, her cheerful nature did not change, and she still throws herself passionately after new goals.

"So that was the story, huh...?"

Masuzu sighed, nodded, and said:

"I understand the 'reason' now."

"Huh?"

"Eita-kun and Harusaki-san can carry on, now that you have a reason."

"Eh?"

No one said anything like that.

At this point, Masuzu gently wrapped her arms around my back.

Her soft body rubbed against me without a hint of shyness.

Her breasts under her uniform squeezed in, her ribbon lost shape from the pressure, and my breath instantly stopped.

"But, do not forget."

Masuzu’s small red mouth opened and closed.

"Don’t forget, Eita-kun. Right now you're my 'boyfriend'."

I swallowed.

"B-B-But aren't I a 'fake'?"

"You are a fake, however you are still 'mine', do not misunderstand that. That's why —"

—Don’t be so kind to other girls right in of me.

I realized I was sweating on my back.

It was still a long way before summer.

"...You, just how much of that was real?"

"How much?"

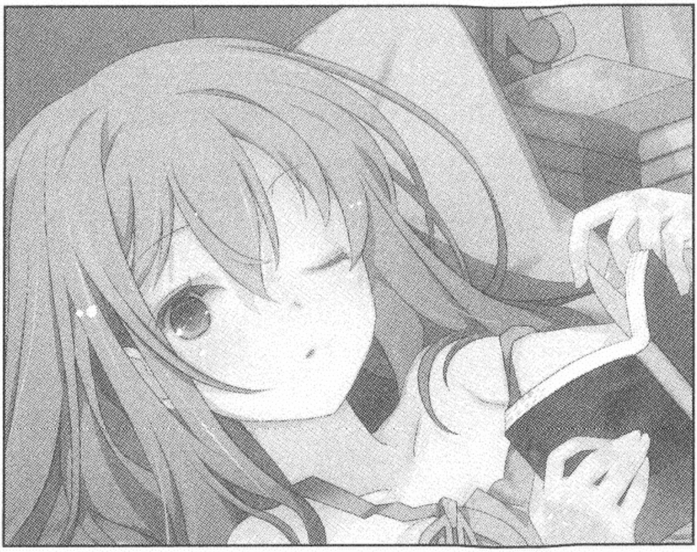
She pulled her body away from me and smiled.

"Absolutely Everything. *A•b•s•o•l•u•t•e•l•y • E•v•e•r•y•t•h•i•n•g* was fake."

This is...

This… Just what type of woman is she?

Post-Chapter Extra



夏川真涼（なつかわますず）

高校一年生。鋭太の彼女(?)。
毒舌家。帰国子女。
好きな言葉は
「君がッ泣くまで殴るのをやめないッ!」

Natsukawa Masuzu.

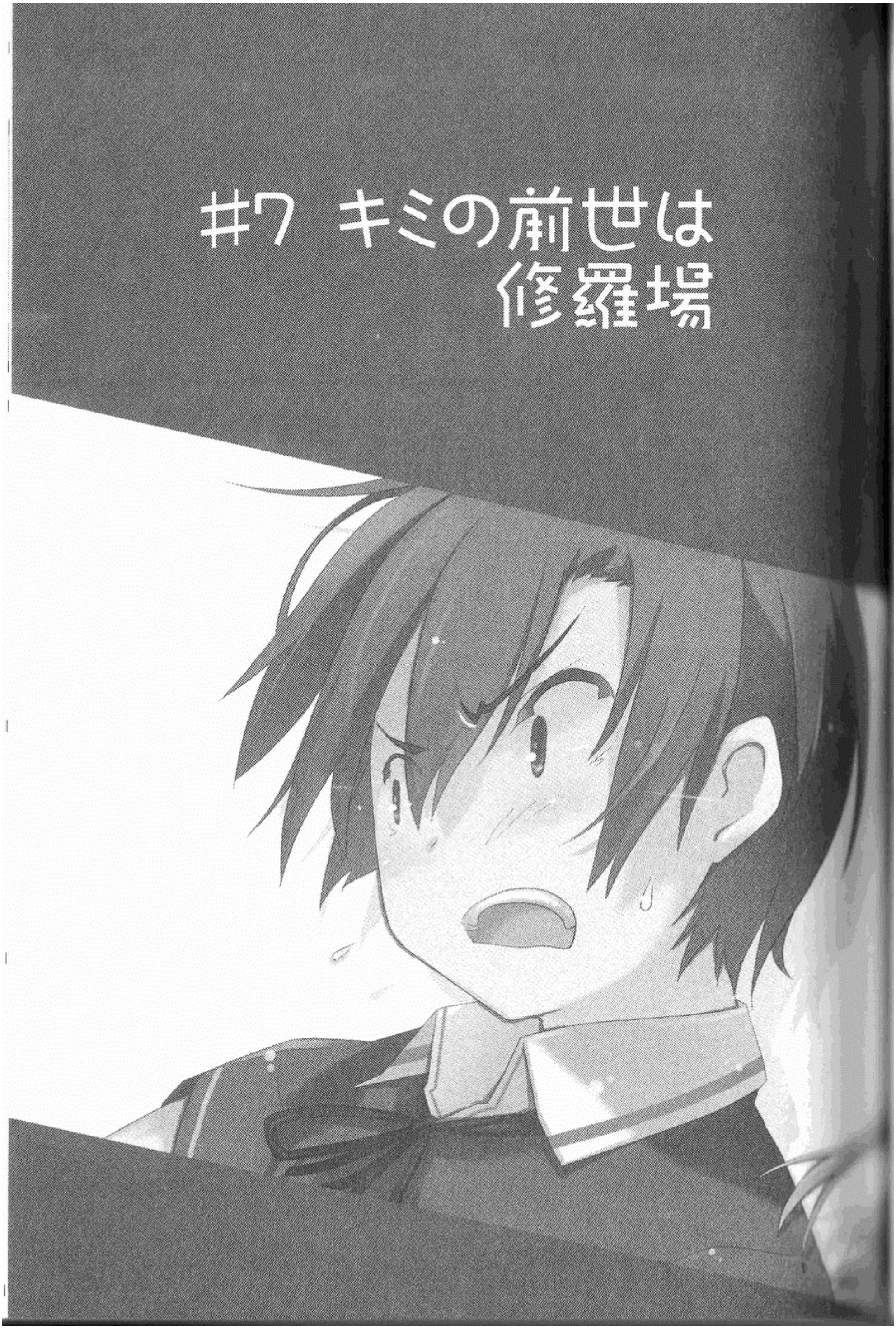
High school freshman, Eita’s girlfriend(?).

Sharp tongue, a kikokujisho[73].

Favorite quote: "I won't stop hitting you until you cry.[74]"

#7: Your Past Life is Mayhem

#7 キミの前世は修羅場



And like this, a week had passed.

To me, every day had passed smoothly. To Masuzu, every day had been awfully boring. To Chiwa, every day had passed without progress.

Even though we made various plans every day, there were few opportunities to implement them in front of Sakagami's little brother. Or, regarding that matter, we were also unable to cooperate, so when club activities were over, we wouldn't have gotten anything done.

But this was fine by me.

There were two weeks before the start of the final exams and I eagerly wanted to live a quiet life before those.

But things never worked out the way I hoped they would.

For example, Wednesday after school—

God seemed to be against me going home. It began to rain, and I didn't have a spare umbrella, so I decided to kill time with the club until the rain stopped. This time:

"—Fighting the enemy head-on might also be a good strategy. "

Masuzu mumbled to herself.

Chiwa tilted her head slightly and asked:

"Nya? Nya, why? Why do we have to fight, nya? [75]"

Last time, they decided 'saying nya while talking is cute'. Here we go again —It wasn't cute, because Chiwa was chewing on red bean bread she bought from the cafeteria, while speaking. Incidentally, my cheeks were splattered by flying grains of bean stuffing.

Don't talk with your mouth full.

"Why do we need to fight? ...Ah, that might do."

After pondering with her eyes for a moment, Masuzu suddenly understood and nodded her head.

"Putting the person you fight aside, the *reason* you're fighting for might be even more important."

Didn't you think about it?

"Hmm... let's do this: We'll make a magnificent 'setting', on which the life or death of a country depends."

"'Setting[76]'...?"

What is this fool saying?

"Well, who are we fighting?"

"Huh?"

"Of course there has to be an enemy! The battle has to have an objective. Parents or teachers? Or is it the school's bad students?"

Masuzu sighed heavily.

"Your way of thinking really lacks imagination. Eita, you can only make such a boring list of words for 'enemies'." …Could it be that even the toilet of your house is an 'old type', the ones that don't need flushing[77]?

"It's a Western type!"

It's even one of those toilet seat with bidet functions.

Anyways, you shouldn't talk about other people's toilets!

"Speaking of the enemy, of course it is some 'those with super powers from the other world[78]'. With unimaginable ability, who came from someplace that no one knows — Does not humanity shine its brightest when we are in need of fighting enemies as such?"

"For what reason would we want to shine?"

"Then we'll become popular."

What, eh, the outcome was this anyways?

"People who fight are popular." ...Like always, ideas were flying in from outer space.

"Well, where are we going to find these kinds of enemies?"

I couldn't help but scoff at such unrealistic ideas.

"Aren't your ideas too preposterous and unrealistic? You are neglecting what's actually possible to achieve in reality. Are you confusing anime and manga with the real world?"

"What you said is absolutely correct."

I thought she would fiercely rebut me, and I didn't expect Masuzu to simply admit.

"In modern times where the flushing toilet is popularized, even bidet functions are very common. However, natural manure toilets have become scarce and valuable as a sign of status… Thus, I wouldn't be surprised if students studying Outdoor Social Studies went to Eita's home and rang his doorbell."

"What are you talking about?"

"So, Manure-Toilet-kun[79], who do you think we should fight with?"

"Shut up! Please spare me!"

If this nickname spread out, I'd be done for!

"Eh, why don't you want to fight? A battle could be popular."

Chiwa exposed her disgust. Half of the red bean bread was unfinished, probably because of the two people rattling about toilets next to her had killed her appetite for it.

"Because I realized that 'fighting spirit' is the most beautiful thing, filled with the concept of 'life or death'. The anxious feeling of battling a powerful enemy… whether it is a he or she, beautiful or ugly, manure toilet or flush toilet, only those who know of those 'circumstances' can become a person that exerts his aura and brilliance."

"...Was it even necessary to include the toilet examples?"

Natsukawa Masuzu was a surprisingly stubborn woman.

"Just like Harusaki-san said earlier, the reasons for a fight are very important. There must be a monumental motive to fight... For example, to revive a country that had been eliminated, or to stop the evolution of the manure toilet."

"Enough is enough, you are really persistent! How are those things great? ...Well, revival of a country is very great indeed, but it’s..."

"*puku*!" Masuzu’s cheeks inflated like rice-cake.

"You just been talking about 'reality' this whole time... Aren’t the stubborn one you, Eita-kun? Since you’re so fond of reality, why don't you just *break up* with me and *marry* reality?"

"Don’t say childish things."

"Then just die, I guess."

"You’re already talking about marriage!?"

'Reality', I think you just became a widow.

Well, I’m not marrying, so I won’t die.

"Well... in this regard, what does the notebook write about it?"

Chiwa seemed to be very interested and leaned forward. It appeared she really liked the theme of the 'motive for battle'.

"Certainly, I should check it up."

Masuzu pulled the notebook preciously out of the upper section of her bag, and hummed as she flipped through it.

...What did I write?

In my retrospective memory, I haven’t got the slightest clue.

Eh, well, after all, the only things written in the notebook were merely 'possible items to try'. It’s impossible that I would have written something like the revival of one’s motherland. No matter how young of a middle school student I was, I should have been able to tell the difference between delusion and reality, Masuzu-kun.

"Mhm, here’s something."

There is *something?!*

My own concept of myself as a middle school school student plummeted.

Despite all the trust I put into him...

Masuzu started reading the notebook.

Fragment of Promise of Victory 47th Celebration ~Pertaining to My True Self~

My real name is the Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn, 'Burning Fighting Fighter'[80].

While I am stronger than S-Class demons with my ZZZ (Triple Z) level, I have no interest in demonstrating my strength. As a result, I am in the D-class.

.*And thus, I'm able to completely smite the small fry enemies single handedly.*

Incidentally, if I go all out with my power I can totally wipe out the galaxy. Single handedly.

I was a Dragon in my past life.

I was the last survivor of the Dragon Race, and the prince of Planet Saint Dragon.

However, I was defeated by the Evil Dragon Clan in the Souzand Days War, and was thus reincarnated on this planet.

But when the Wyverns discovered my reincarnation, they opened the great gate, and came to this planet.

They use powerful Large Amounts of Camouflage to hide the traces of their actions.

But they cannot fool my eyes. Whenever they are close, the right insignia in my hand, it will start to ache, informing me of their location, Gozaru yo[81].

Secret technique: Fate's Dark Black Flame[82].

From those who escaped to this planet, I will gather the Seven Holy Heavenly Dragon Kings[83]*, and will one day resurrect my home planet—'*

As Masuzu read, I had been rolling on the floor in pain.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO—"

Don’t!

Stop it!

Natsukawa Masuzu, do you have some bitter hatred for me?

Are you still angry about the past few days? Are you angry because I made that 'accusation of not wearing any'?

Were my crimes so grave, that you have to force me to withstand this insult?

Lies, that can't possibly be.

A demonic world where such severe punishment is given to that type of crime, can that even be called a human realm?!

"'He' is really one-of-a-kind."

Masuzu closed her eyes and hugged the notebook tightly in her arms.

"The difference in scale between 'saving a planet' and the 'revival of a country', can be called 'grand'. It really makes me feel ashamed."

Even Chiwa had opened her eyes wide. 'Amazing!' How far could this guy go?

"Oh, right, what is 'Large Amount of Camouflage' Does that mean they’ll light up during the night?"

"When I first heard it, I interpreted it literally, so it should mean it’s a very expensive kind of camouflage."

I’m sorry. It’s actually a typo that’s supposed to read, 'optical camouflage'[84]*. I wrote this entry, there was a movie playing that night that had this monster. Because I thought it was really cool, I actually copied it down.*

"Also, when he says, *Gozaru yo*. What is that? Why is this the only phrase that uses the tone of a samurai?"

"It must be some kind of secret signal. One of the 'Seven Holy Heavenly Dragon Kings' might understand when they see it."

Sorry… this was something I just wrote on a whim.

"I am more interested in this thing called 'Destiny's Dark Black Flame'."

"Even though I don't really understand... it should be some kind of pure dark magic[85]."

I'm sorry…

"Also, the Souzand Days should be Hundred[86], right? Or Thousand[87] be written like thousands[88], right?"

"Things must be the opposite on the Planet Saint Dragon."

"—I humbly apologize for having been booooorn!"

I had already... unwittingly fallen to my knees.

Mother, I'm sorry.

Father, Forgive me.

There, after all they've dedicated to the children[89].

"Why do you look so defeated?"

The sound of Masuzu confusion drew me back to reality.

"Let's say this first: Please don't think you can reach the end of this so easily. Psychologically prepare yourself, because after ten weeks we will cease serializing[90]."

"My own life is in the hands of you, the editor?"

"Only 'JUMP' can see Kidou Eita-sensei bow down to the ground."

"You intend to let national bookstores and convenience stores distribute it?"

This woman is really uses nasty words.

But is this really something you should be saying to your 'boyfriend'?

I originally thought only Chiwa would be flabbergasted, but I could only see her quietly be savoring the taste of red bean bread again, as if she were completely used to the situation.

"But... Masuzu."

"What is it, not-serialized-person-who-kneels-at-manure-toilet-kun?"

"At least let me collect myself...!"

Patience, patience, I have to be patient.

"This is just that guy being delusional, right? It has nothing to do with fighting, right?"

"You're so superficial, Eita-kun."

"*Hmph!*" There was a glimmer in Masuzu’s eyes.

"You really are superficial."

"Save it."

"You're at korosuke's level ~*nari*[91]."

"I don’t understand what you mean!"

Masuzu’s tongue seemed to be in top shape today ~*nari*.

"Wasn’t Harusaki-san’s fated opponent already described in great clarity by the notebook?"

Along with me, Chiwa opened her eyes wide.

"Ehhh? Who?"

"The enemy of your past life. It’ll be fine if you just fight with the enemy of your past lives."

"My past life?"

"Oh, you forgot already?"

"A normal person wouldn’t bother remembering it!"

Masuzu gave me an amorous glance, and said:

"The poor Eita-kun... It seems like Harusaki-san simply forgot the every day spent with you."

"Huh? I was childhood friends with Chiwa even in my past life?"

"Even when it rained, she took you out for walks, feed you pet food, and also dealt with your feces."

"My previous life was a dog?"

"Nope, you were human."

"[...]"

That would be even more tragic.

Right, why did Masuzu know about our past lives?

"If you can’t remember, just pick something random. Harusaki-san, what animal do you like?"

"Uh —panda."

"Well then, Harusaki-san’s past life was a planarian panda."

"What kind of animal is that? It can’t be a planarian and a panda together!"

"Then it’s a planarian."

"Disgusting!"

"Don’t be so un-willful , Harusaki-san."

"You’re the one who is arrogant!"

The two of them began talking in very comic dialogue.

It seemed like Chiwa was gradually starting to get used to Masuzu’s habits.

"Talking about what animal I was in my past life, you’re kidding me!"

"Then what is the correct one?

"Uh—" Chiwa thought about it for a moment, and said:

"Even though this has nothing to do with the notebook, what do you think of a princess of a country?"

"In that case, noble birth is typical in past lives."

"Surrounded by a country’s gentle affection, I lived in a white castle. My homeland had a mild climate, and the clear sea was nearby. It was possible to pick luscious fruit by hand and the local specialties were delicious meat dishes."

Chiwa twiddled her fingers while talking nonstop.

"Then one day, when I was very hungry, a prince who originates from Kobe[92] came on his horse and asked me to marry him. He said: 'If you marry me, I will let you eat all the high-quality beef you can eat!'"

"And where would that rosy colored place be?"

What a savage fairy tale.

This way of seeing the world is a mess.

It made me feel... kinda very angry.

"I felt very good in this past life, but I didn’t have any enemies."

"Isn't that good, a world that is always peaceful."

I felt anxious!

"But if war broke out, a lot of tragic events would happen... So, what if they held a sports competition instead? And thus the 'enemy' would just become an 'opponent'."

I was restless!

"Ah, if the opponents set up a duel with the royal prince, that might be cool! Using a year’s worth of high-quality meat as the stakes, the two would meet in the final game and confess… how romantic, ahh—"

Touch—

"DON'T SCREW AROUND WITH PAST LIVES!"

I banged the table with my fist.

"Listen. Your past life can’t be described as a 'Field of Flowers'! You need to have suffering entanglements and then have dramatic problems that extend to the present day. What's with this 'In my past life, I lived in a castle of happiness as a princess☆ '-bit? What did you turn your past life into? The princess identity is fake! Unreal! Skin deep! In fact, unknown to everyone, the Princess Knight and the Devil God fought! Or at the very least, say something about being a New-Type in house arrest in the castle basement where prototype Mobile Suits were hidden!”

It was quiet – there was not a sound in the clubroom.

Chiwa had nothing to say, and even Masuzu was frozen.

I suddenly regained consciousness:

"...No, that..."

Damn...

I gave in to the call of my old 'blood'.

How do I say it? I had a general rule with delusions.

Once excessive self-beautification becomes arrogant, it’s not good.

If one falls into this kind of atmosphere, the story will suddenly become very old-fashioned, and will always feel less romantic.

At that time I had an obsession towards these kinds of things.

"It's exactly how Eita-kun says!"

Masuzu’s eyes sparkled.

“Indeed, a past life definitely cannot lack the 'dramatic' element. Any person would be fascinated by warriors fighting a secret battle to resolve a conflict extended from a past life. This would definitely makes one popular, definitely!”

"Okay —but I still think that a royal prince who originates from Kobe is also good."

Although Chiwa wasn’t good at accepting criticism, this was actually a normal reaction.

"Well, since Ei-kun already said it, why don’t you give it a try? Who do you want to fight?"

"You can come up with one..."

Delusions are delusions. They’re impossible to implement in real life.

For example, even I can’t actually fight a Wyvern, right? This is obvious, of course.

However, Masuzu eagerly spoke up:

"No problem, you don’t need to actually fight."

"Huh?"

"Just pretend. Pretend you are fighting with your enemies."

It was exactly like the time with the guitar. Unreservedly, she said:

"In battle manga, the best parts do not lie in the battle scenes. Rather, the essence comes from the drama just before the fight. All you need to do is show both sides in their desperate life-or-death situations and reveal the charm of the 'warrior'!"

"So you seriously like anime and manga *very* much."

"Abroad, I was obsessed with Japanese culture, almost to the point of being sordid."

So originally *this* was the reason.

"I will utilize these experiences to write a screenplay. Harusaki-san can follow the script during the performance. As for Eita-kun, please help out."

After Masuzu spent one night writing the screenplay, we followed the script and practiced for two days.

It felt as if we were holding a cultural festival.

Noisily, we managed to finish the work... You could say it was worth it, because Chiwa seemed very energetic in the process.

Yet, when the progress from practice ended, I had nothing to say.

The real challenge would be the actual performance in front of the entire class...

◆

Saturday after school.

Chiwa came to the classroom. Everyone in the room was happily talking about their plans for the weekend.

When she opened the door, her first words were:

"GAIA is wailing!"

Here it comes—

I always felt that this was ferocious, ah.

"Such strong aura... those guys are no longer hiding their full strength."

You're not hiding your foolishness…

Well, forget it. This was in accordance with Masuzu’s performance script.

"Ei-kun, don’t you feel it? 13 kilometers south of us there’s an ominous aura. It is very powerful… its rating is over one million."

"N-No, I don’t feel it."

"Ah, Ei-kun has no hope controlling the battle race."

She’s still talking about ethnicity…

We’re both Japanese!

Chiwa’s debut shrouded the classroom in a wonderful tension. Because of the lesson learned from last time, no one dared approach her within a radius of meters. Yet no one left the classroom. Perhaps they were all frightened and fascinated at the same time.

Sakagami’s brother was frozen in his seat, breathlessly watching as the situation changed.

As for Masuzu, she stared at Chiwa with an 'aah, so scary' expression. Even though she was like this every time… She really was a great actor.

"I feel it… There are two strong auras, two even stronger auras, and another small one… T-This one is about to fade away… No! It can’t!”

"What’s happening— Chiwa—?"

I still hadn’t got into the flow of acting. I'm sorry.

“The piece of aura that is strongly restrained seems like it came from my past life! It must be my dearest friend!"

"You’ve regained the memories from your past life?”

"Yes. I remember it all now. It came back to me last night, when I was cleaning the mold from the bathroom floor!"

Suddenly, everyone in the room seemed to feel livelier, likely due to the effort of Masuzu to bring authenticity to the performance.

"No matter what, it looks like my only choice is to go..."

Chiwa smiled slightly.

"Wait! Don’t go —if you go now, you’ll just die."

"Don’t stop me, Ei-kun! As a soldier, there must be times when one had to go to war. I bet my life on fighting people, the pride of our country."

It seemed like she was tongue-tied.

After all, those were words that weren’t frequently used in everyday life.

"I'm not necessarily going to lose!"

"W-What?"

"If you use that tool, you will be able to see the powers of the-other-side’s machines. Look carefully at the value of the power!"

Even though it seemed wordy, the first-person 'I' was specially replaced for the purposes of the performance arrangement.

While clutching her fists and bending at the waist, Chiwa’s temples bulged blue veins. She growled 'Hahahahaha! '. It looked like a ceremony to release her fighting spirit — but in my opinion, it looked like someone holding 'it' in.

In short, I followed the script, put on sunglasses, and said:

"Fighting-Level's 10000... 12000... how is this possible? It’s still rising!"

"Haaaaaaaaaaaa—!"

"S-So strong —With your memory, you can also retrieve the life force from your past-life."

"Deeee Yaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

♪CHA-LA—

♪HEAD-CHA-LA[93]—

"Jiu-jiu-jiuuuu-jiu-jiuuuu-jiu-jiuuuu. This is my real strength: Jiu-jiuuuu-jiu-jiuuuu."

This loud noise, jiu-jiuu, was supposed to represent the power of aura flooding the room, protecting her entire body.

"Good Lord! Chiwa! Maybe like this you can actually win!"

"Hiyaaaaah, jiu-jiuuuu-jiu-jiuuu— I’m going to say now— jiu-jiuuuu-jiu-jiuuuu —I can still can put out more force than this —jiu-jiuuuu-jiu-jiuuuu."

"Amazing! Too cool! Marry me!"

I pressed my luck and went for it.

"I remember the past! We must stand our ground! Dopyu!"

That last 'dopy' wasn't literal in its meaning, yet it referred to the sound effect of being launched into the sky.

Of course, it was impossible to fly, so Chiwa ran out of the classroom.

It was in order to save the life her fettered close friend from a past life.

I stared at the figure of Chiwa’s back, and said:

"Don’t die, Chiwa!"

I whispered to myself:

—End of the first part.

At this point, the classroom burst into a round of applause.

Cheers enveloped the classroom, and even shook the glass windows.

For a moment I froze, my mouth wide open:

"Huh? What? We’re popular? Is it true?"

The remaining classmates in the classroom gave a standing ovation, smiling.

Sakagami’s little brother clapped his hands and said: "Terrific! Terrific!”

"Great job, Kidou-kun!"

"I always thought you were a stiff, formal person. No one expected this side of you!"

"Chihuahua's acting was so realistic, too! Terrific, ah! I'm seeing it all in a new light!"

Everyone unanimously praised her.

"Aaaahhhh, is it?"

I responded with a stiff smile, and Sakagami's brother innocently asked me:

"Yes, what was that skit for? Where will you be performing it on stage?"

"[...] ...Well—"

I didn't know how to respond. I looked at Masuzu.

I thought that she would have laughed like the time with the guitar, yet, I did not expect that her face would be dipped downward, with both her hands and feet on the floor—

"Skit...? I did my best to write a screenplay and performance... and it turned out to be a skit...!"

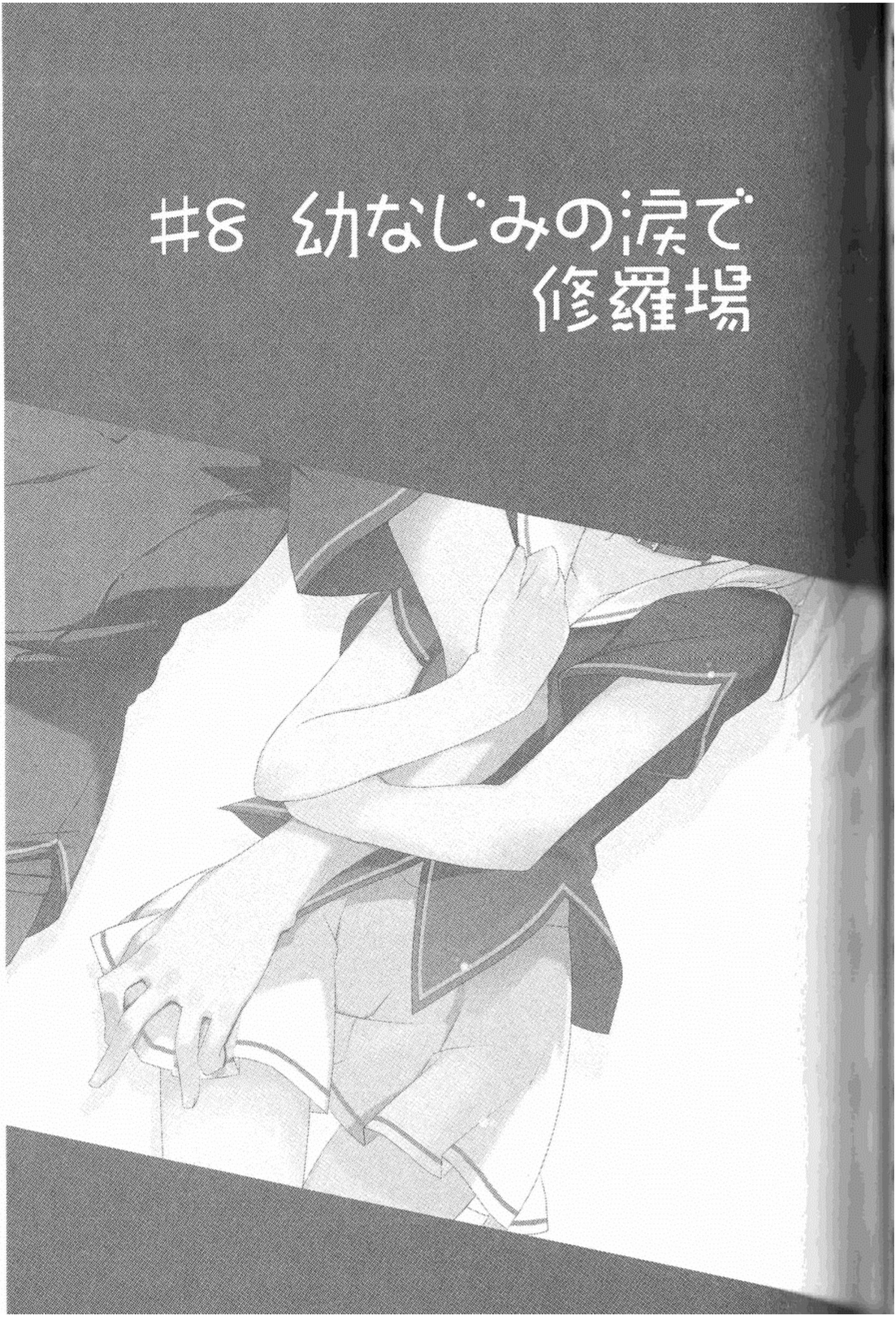
Ah, she is completely in shock.

And I thought she was just playing around with Chiwa, too.

In fact, maybe she had put in all of her effort and had seriously pursued the club activities after all.

#8: A Childhood Friend's Tears are Mayhem

#8 幼なじみの涙で修羅場



Sunday passed and soon it was after school on Monday.

After two days of not going to the clubroom, I saw huge vivid words written on the whiteboard.

'The time has come!」

With her back to the whiteboard, Masuzu announced boldly:

"Yes, the time is coming."

"What, nyaw[94]?"

Chiwa said, chewing curry bread in her mouth. She was always eating, so why didn't she grow taller?

"The time? What's with that?"

"Of course it's time for Harusaki-san to confess to Sakagami-senpai."

"Hah?"

"Since the last two incidents, Sakagami-senpai's love points must have risen a lot. According to my calculations, he should have entered the 'completely-smitten」 level."

Are you serious...?

"No matter what you say, it's too soon, right? Last time, everyone said it was just a funny skit."

"Eeeh?! Really?"

Ah, right. Chiwa still doesn't know.

"Regarding that matter, it seems like it had a positive effect regardless."

Using this sentence as an introduction, Masuzu continued:

"Sakagami-senpai is reportedly a big comedy fan. He particularly likes skits, even if they're about guitars or past life events. I even heard that he 'really wanted to see it」, and he deeply regretted that he couldn't. He also seems to find Harusaki-san very interesting."

"Is this a blessing in disguise?"

Having failed to become a guitarist or a warrior of a past life, in the end the winning role was being an actor?

...Like that, after all this time, our hard work is...

"S-Skit...? Even I put my whole body into the acting performance... yet they called it a skit...?!"

At a loss for words, Chiwa suddenly dropped her body flat on the table. She was just like Masuzu at that time, shocked by the claim.

"Certainly we are not in a position where we can run away from the battle, thus—"

"Hey, wait a minute."

I hastily stopped Masuzu after listening to her.

"Even if the skit was really popular, it's not like that necessarily will lead to a love-struck mind. Moreover, he's a very popular senpai, and is always surrounded by many girls. I don't think he will be immediately enticed."

Since it's a confession, it's necessary prepare oneself to succeed.

If she was rejected, we'd be back to square one and all this would had been a mere long detour.

"What you say seems reasonable."

I always thought she would disagree with me, so I didn't expect Masuzu to nod and continue:

"Eita-kun, in your eyes, what's the estimated chance of success?"

"At most, one or two percent."

"We'll want at least five percent before we can hope to succeed. We'll have to work harder, and think of a campaign strategy—"

"Wait."

Chiwa got up and raised her hand:

"I'll t-try confessing."

"...You serious?"

"Even if I'm refused, we can think of new plans! It'll also be a good experience, regardless of success or failure. Let's try it."

"Well, decision in this matter is really up to you. Are you confident in yourself?"

"How could I be?"

Chiwa smiled, not the least bit concerned.

Masuzu muttered to herself:

"It's almost as if she wants to be rejected."

"There's no such thing! What kind of idiot thinks they'll lose before even trying?"

Inadvertently, Chiwa denied the claim while flustered.

Hmnp... All right, fine.

Well, since they've already settled on a decision, there's no room for others to interrupt.

"So, how will you confess?"

"It's better if Harusaki-san doesn't confess directly. Otherwise it'll be just like when we practiced confessing a few days ago. If she's even a little bit nervous, it can easily fail."

Indeed, Chiwa was very nervous and uneasy when she was on the roof.

"This time different! I won't be nervous this time."

"Then, why were you like that *that* time?"

"That was because it was with Ei-kun..."

Chiwa’s faced flushed red as she glanced at me.

What is it?

Why does she become nervous when she practices on me? We even intentionally decided to let her practice on a friend.

"In short: Don’t confess directly. Put a 'love letter in the shoe cupboard」, the old-fashioned way."

"Mhm, this is a reliable method."

Chiwa nodded only slightly.

After wasting a full two hours, the three of us persevered with polishing the contents of the letter until the last period before school ended.

Hello Sakagami Takuya Senpai:

Sorry for suddenly writing to you.

I am first-year Harusaki Chiwa from class five.

Ever since entering high school, I've liked you.

If you don’t hold anything against my words, please meet with me.

Between five and six o’clock this evening, I will be on the roof after school waiting for you.

If you don’t have a similar kind of feeling, please disregard this letter.

Should that be the case, I will give up and forget about it.

"Don’t you feel as if it’s too cold like this?"

When I stated my feelings, Masuzu immediately said:

"No, if the article is written too enthusiastically, it can easily lead the other side to back down with the opposite effect. Something like this is refreshing and crisp with better content."

Since she came up with more than half of the letter and was responsible for transcribing it, Masuzu confidently stood tall.

"But if you ask him to ignore it if he has no interest or give up and forget about it, I feel like you give the impression of not having any faith."

"This is to show that when he leaves, he won’t get the impression he’s entangled in a mess. It’s easier to make it seem like you have the intent of 'wanting to become a friend」."

Huh...

Is that true?

"Chiwa, do you think this is all right?"

Chiwa looked absentminded.

Dazed, she stared at the bottom of her empty teacup.

"Eh, ah, um, ah? Natsukawa’s handwriting is very beautiful."

"I'm wasn’t referring to that detail... What do you think of the content?"

"Uh, I think it’s fine?"

What is wrong with her?

Now she's starting to get nervous?

"Tomorrow morning when you first head to school, put this letter in senpai’s shoe cupboard, all right?"

Chiwa took the cute pink envelope, and nodded.

So, what was going to happen next?

◆

The results were immediately announced.

As specified in the letter, Sakagami-senpai came to the roof at exactly five o’clock ——

"I accept."

"Huh?"

Senpai faced the stunned Chiwa and said, smiling:

"I as well, always thought that Harusaki-san was very cute."

"R-Really?"

"I’ve heard about you a lot from my brother. He says you play the guitar?"

"Ah, uh, I guess you could say so."

Lies, you can’t play a single piece!

"I also heard that you’re currently fighting a powerful and unknown enemy?"

"Uh, um, that. I’m already finished with that..."

There weren’t any enemies in the first place!

"Girls like you are pretty interesting. You have a sense of mystery."

Do you have a problem in the head, senpai?

"In short, why don’t we go to the movies this Sunday? Just tell me what you want to watch, all right, Chihuahua-chan?"

——The story above is what Chiwa relayed to us.

After Chiwa finished speaking, she sat down in her chair in a daze.

She still can’t believe that the confession was successful?

You're right, even I can’t quite believe it.

After all, Chiwa has a boyfriend!

...No, she is already a high school student. If you just consider the situation, it should be not surprising that she finally found a boyfriend.

My head just can’t keep up with how fast everything changes.

Obviously I would have liked to congratulate her, but I just couldn’t make myself say it.

When she heard that I got a girlfriend, maybe Chiwa had gotten into such a mood. As things stood, I suppose it made sense.

"Success!"

Masuzu drew on the whiteboard the huge giant word, 'Awesome!」.

"A victory in a single shot! This is a great success for the Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self! After all this time spent on activities, we have finally reached and obtained definite results. As the president there is nothing more gratifying."

Clasping her hands, Masuzu’s entire body shook violently as she looked up at the ceiling.

It seemed that she was very happy.

If we left her continue like that, she would possibly start dancing in circles. I kind of wanted to see that sort of situation.

"Even if you say, 'all this time spent on activities」, it’s only been a few weeks, right? Also, since when did you become the president?"

"Don’t pour cold water on me while I'm having such a great after taste."

Although she pouted, Masuzu still looked *very* happy.

"Excluding Harusaki-san’s charm, this success clearly proves the power of 'his」 notebook. Eita-kun also has reasons to be happy, right?"

"A-A-Annoying! It has nothing to do with me!"

"——That is, ahh."

Chiwa, who had been silent this entire time, suddenly opened her mouth and said:

"The person who wrote this notebook must be Natsukawa’s first love, right? He should be someone great, I think."

"...Ahh?"

What does that mean?

I can’t just turn a deaf ear to that.

"T-Those kinds of guys can only write delusions or weird things! How is he great?"

As I was letting out a big voice, Chiwa stared at me inconceivably.

"To be honest, I do not understand much about the contents of that notebook, but I think guitar and past life parts were cool."

"A-Are they?"

That's right…

It’s so normal.

This is exactly what a natural reaction is.

However, Chiwa shook her head and said:

"But— the fact that he isn’t shy and did not hesitate to fully believe in those 'cool things」. I think that point is very cool of him."

"...What's with that?"

One who’s fully convinced that they’re cool, is cool?

But, the person who wrote like that was me in middle school?

To be 'extraordinarily」 mistaken as 'cool」, I felt very ashamed.

The current me didn’t believe in an ounce of those things.

I even felt like it was a stain on my life.

[...]

"Natsukawa, thank you."

Chiwa asked to shake hands with Masuzu.

"Thanks to you and your first love, you let me reach my goal."

"But you don’t look too happy?"

Masuzu shook her hand, but tilted her head puzzled.

"This isn’t like you. To be more straight forward with 'I’d gotten a boyfriend, yeah!」 claim, it would have been more natural."

"...Ahahaha, right, haha."

Chiwa laughed.

But...

She did not cheer.

◆

That day for dinner, there were all of Chiwa's favorite foods.

Garlic fried beef, banbanji chicken salad, and hamburger.

This menu was in celebration of her successful confession and also to pray for her first date on Sunday.

Nevertheless, Chiwa did not eat. Normally, her chopsticks would have long outstretched to steal my hamburger.

We also couldn't start chatting and the table was absolutely quiet. You could even hear dogs barking in the distance.

...This is not a celebration dinner, but rather more like the wake of a funeral.

I tried to speak up with a cheerful voice:

"A-Altogether, it was great! You reached your goal."

Chiwa nodded slightly and said:

"I caught the school's most famous senpai, so you can say I'm finally popular."

"Yeah."

Though in reality, I felt like one needed a lot of boys chasing after them before one could be called popular.

However, in this case, quality was more important than quantity, right?

"If the news spread, the girls will become very envious of you. The boys will also look at you from a new light and then nobody will call you 'Sorry Chihuahua」 from now on."

"But senpai's fans will hate me, so will they collectively harass me?"

"No problem. If it's you, you can turn it right back at them."

"Ahahaha, really?"

The dialogue ended here and the living room was quiet again.

Eh...

Why was the atmosphere so difficult to liven up?

"——Is it really fine?"

Chiwa muttered loudly.

"Eh?"

"About me going out with Senpai, Ei-kun is OK with it?"

"What are you saying? Didn’t we set up this club exactly for this purpose? We even planned such a number of different strategies and tried really hard to reach your goal."

"...The Maiden’s Club. From now on, what will it be?"

"We’ll temporarily stop activities. After all, we’ve already reached the goal."

"So it’s like this… I feel quite empty."

"Well I’m relaxed, I can finally concentrate on studying."

Chiwa put down the chopsticks, even though she hadn’t even eaten half of her food.

She lowered her head, and said:

"Ei-kun really is fine regardless of what happens with me?"

"What?"

"It's true. Ei-kun is Natsukawa Masuzu’s boyfriend after all."

Her words were clearly bitter.

"...What? I tried so hard to help you become popular, isn't that right? Didn't you say you wanted to experience romance like in shoujo manga? For this purpose you pushed yourself so hard, right?"

"Yeah, I tried so desperately."

"Then this is the reward you got. So what kind of thing still bothers..."

"This is not a reward!"

Chiwa yelled after raising her head.

"...Eh?"

What does that mean?

Don't tell me that only one senior's admiration is not enough.

"It's fine? To Ei-kun it's fine even if I start dating other boys? In the future maybe I won't even be able to eat dinner with you!"

"Something like that..."

No.

Perhaps that was exactly right.

Even though we were childhood friends, no matter how familiar, if he knows she was always eating dinner with another boy, perhaps senpai will have feelings like that.

A table without Chiwa.

Dinner for one person alone.

...Somehow, that feels a little lonely.

But—

"I-I will cope with it."

I tried my best to be brave in front of Chiwa.

"After all, your dream has finally come true, after all this trouble."

I said.

Then I noticed...

Chiwa's large eyes were full of tears.

Tears suddenly brimmed in her eyes and slowly dripped down her cheeks.

"——Idiot."

Chiwa said repeatedly, while crying:

"Stupid, stupid idiot, Ei-kun is an idiot...!"

Like the night when she decided that she wanted to become popular, she called me a bunch of bad names.

Her voice was like a howling animal, and presently seemed overcome by puppy-like weakness.

"O-Oi, Chiwa...?"

"Idiot! I hate Ei-kun! I hate you the most! "

"What do you mean?"

"I hate being Ei-kun's childhood friend! If I were an ordinary student, with an ordinary relationship with you, then I wouldn't suffer this much! There's nothing good that comes out of being your childhood friend!"

"...Eeeh?"

What?

You don't want to be my childhood friend?

"W-Why are you saying this so suddenly? We knew each other since we were little. We were just like older brother and little sister, right?"

Chiwa looked at me with red eyes:

"You’re wrong! I’d be your older sister by three months and ten days!"

"Why do you suddenly care about this now? Fine! We can be older sister and little brother. Nontheless, we’re like family."

"That’s why I hate it, like I said before!"

She burst into tears.

What...?

W-Why do you have that expression on your face?

"P-Please, please don’t cry. Okay? Chiwa, don’t cry."

"As if I could do that! Idiooooot!"

Chiwa threw down those words, cried out, and stood up.

Before I could stop her, she ran out into the corridor.

I was left standing in place, without an opportunity to chase after her.

"...What’s going on..."

Did I do something wrong?

Thinking about it.

Did I do anything to hurt Chiwa?

Indeed, ever since the establishment of the Jien-Otsu, everything I did was for myself. I won’t deny that.

But it was also for the sake of Chiwa.

So that Chiwa can find a boyfriend.

The jien otsu temporarily reached that goal and I am finally able to concentrate on studying.

By all rights, it should benefit the both of us.

But Chiwa cried so much.

Did I get it wrong?

Really, where did I go wrong?

I simply could not see the logic of it. It was embarrassing. Even if I was studying constantly, my natural tendencies weren’t going to change, okay?

However, one thing was clear:

"I made Chiwa cry."

Damn!

Why am I so depressed?

Why do I feel so sad?

Wasn’t this a good thing? Perhaps it was a good opportunity to settle an ill-fated relationship. Since the beginning, this had burdened Masuzu as the unstable factor. If troublemaker Chiwa kept her distance from me, my school life could be so much more stable.

She was such an incomparable noisy troublesome girl.

"I can't possibly do something like that…"

In her platters, Chiwa left half of her hamburger unfinished.

On top of that, the potpourri miso soup, and freshly cooked rice, she left completely untouched.

As I watched these steaming dishes gradually cool, my heart felt cold.

Looking at this... I suddenly remembered something——

"Ah, right."

Exactly so.

I said it before, didn’t I?

I said Kaoru also told something about it, right?

Chiwa is 'family」.

The loss of family members.

Of course it’s painful...

◇

That night I dreamed.

It was a dream about the past.

The time was early autumn of last year ——that is, something that happened during the second semester of my third year in middle school.

◇

During the time of day when the sky just darkened, I had sat in a living room chair without even the lights on.

"So my house was always so big, huh...?"

It had been about a month since my father and mother disappeared, and I had been left alone.

Even though my relatives had been looking for the whereabouts of my parents, they hadn’t been able to find them and were filled with an atmosphere of wanting to give up. I even heard they had already begun to discuss, 'who was to become my guardian」 amongst them.

No, properly speaking, it was: 'Who I was going to be dumped on」.

Now I did not think they were ruthless. It was a natural reaction, after all. They had their own lives, so who suddenly wanted the 'take in a middle school student child」? Because I was required to be under custody of relatives, this was a very hard task. I had never heard of this Saeko, an unmarried aunt I was about to get under the custody of, the prospects seemed rather dim.

I already have no family.

I have to survive alone.

"It’s about time for dinner."

The kitchen was piled with empty boxes of cup noodles and convenience store bentos. I had been eating these recently. Thinking back to that day, I might even had to eat from the plastic containers, it's kinda unsettling.

At this point, a noise came from the corridor.

"Yahoo— Ei-kun—!"

I turned around and found Chiwa’s face pressed against the glass.

She was dressed in hospital pajamas. Although it was already autumn, she was sweating.

"H-How did you get here?!"

I quickly ran to open the window.

I saw her right hand on crutches while she scratched her head with the left. She laughed with a 'tehehe」 as she said:

"I came unconsciously."

"How can you just 'come unconsciously」? You were in the hospital, right? Anyways, can you walk?"

Since the traffic accident in June, Chiwa had been hospitalized.

Last month, I went to visit her, she couldn’t move out of bed and looked very painful...

"Well, I can walk, but this foot isn’t good. They can’t take the cast off yet."

'Take a look!」, She raised her right foot to show me.

"Today, I took advantage of the walking exercise and walked to Ei-kun’s home."

"...Did you get a leave of absence?"

"Ehh— I haven’t smelled Ei-kun’s scent in a while, the smell of Ei-kun’s home♪."

"You didn’t get permission? You slipped out!"

Chiwa expertly maneuvered the crutches and came into the living room without being invited.

This was just like how Chiwa always acted.

"Really, you’re such a carefree soul..."

As she kept talking, I took a deep sigh of relief.

I was very grateful.

After all, in this kind of situation, if Chiwa’s situation were very bad, I wouldn't be able to bear it.

Even though my family would never be able to recover.

But at least I could hope Chiwa would be able to smile like before.

"It looks like your recovery went smoothly. When can you leave the hospital?"

"Probably next month when they remove the cast."

poof! Chiwa sat on the sofa.

"After that, I’ll begin the real rehabilitation and regain my strength back bit by bit through training. The doctor said I’d be able to walk like I used to within this year."

'Thank you for worrying about me!」, Chiwa smiled and seemed to hint while bowing slightly.

"This is… great! It’s really, really good news!"

I was really happy.

I felt like I hadn’t laughed truly from my heart in a long time.

"Well, once you enter high school, the sword-wielding Chihuahua will once again be resurrected. If I remember correctly, you’re also going to Hane High School? I heard that club activities have a strong emphasis there, you can definitely make it as a team regular!"

"—This…"

Chiwa said with a smile:

"I won’t be able to practice kendo anymore."

"Eh?"

I turned my head and stared at Chiwa’s face.

Along with the brilliant smile I had seen since I was little, there was a shadow of vagueness I had never seen before mixed in.

"I really can’t do intense exercises anymore. The doctor said the bones in my lower back aren’t very good. Of course I'm going to do my best with the rehabilitation, however, I have to give up on Kendo from now on."

"——."

I was thinking: *So this was the feeling when one stopped thinking.*

Because when we first met, Chiwa had already been holding a shinai.

From very early in the morning, she would practice in the courtyard, disturbing my sleep.

On her way home, the huge body armor she carried would make a 'ka-la-ka-la-la」 sound and she would catch up to ask me: 'Shall we go home together?」

Before competitions, Chiwa would have a serious expression on her face and look as if she were a different person, so much so it would shock me.

I’ll never see this ever again——?

"Well, the quack doctor must be wrong, he *must* be wrong!"

I waved my fist while desperately advocating.

"You should find a b-better doctor! That quack doctor is absolutely a sham, right?"

"My dad said he was one of the city's best doctors."

"A lie! He has to be a sham! A doctor who could say that kind of thing, one hundred percent has to be a sham!"

Chiwa didn’t comment, and merely smiled and said: 'Ah, really…」

"Let’s not talk about me. What about you, Ei-kun?"

"Huh?"

"What’s going to happen to Ei-kun?"

I looked to the side and said:

"Ah... Well, we’ll figure it out somehow."

"You’re not going to just disappear, are you?"

Chiwa looked at my face uneasily.

"...Ah."

At this time, I finally understood—

Why she slipped out of the hospital, to come here.

"You’re not going to vanish, right? Ei-kun isn’t going to go somewhere else?"

As a result, I tried to show my best smile, and said:

"Of course, right? Aside here, where else is my home?"

"That’s— T-That's right!"

We laughed as we looked at each other.

"...Right, you haven’t eaten yet? Is there anything you can’t eat?"

"No, there’s nothing I can’t eat."

"Then I’ll go cook now and we can eat together."

"When you say to cook... do you mean cup noodles?"

"Idiot. Of course it’s formal cooking. What else do you want to eat?"

Chiwa opened her eyes wide.

"Ei-kun, cook? Can you?"

"Of course the men of today can cook! I’ll cook what you like to eat."

"T-Then, hamburger!"

Thus, the two of us went shopping.

I constantly flipped through the recipe book without stopping, to look for hamburgers.

Chiwa rolled and laughed at the table.

"This hamburger is yellow-green colored!"

"No, because we haven’t eaten vegetables recently, I added the green beans."

"But this has turned into some other kind of food!"

Absolutely right...

Because the minced meat fell apart, it became 'sautéed shredded pork with peas and onion」.

"Damn! I’ll let you laugh for now. I just haven’t shown myself being serious yet! If I really get serious, any dish will be a piece of cake."

"That’s the spirit, Ei-kun! Someday you’ll let me eat some delicious hamburger!"

"Leave it to me!"

We gave a toast with fruit juice.

We ate food that was something like hamburger and fought with each other.

"Once I go to high school, I need to find something even more interesting than kendo. It has to be more fascinating and interesting to people than the shinai!"

"Well, you should go look for it. You are a high school student after all, completely different from middle school students. I’m sure you can find something."

"What about Ei-kun? What will you do after starting high school? "

"Ehh— I..."

After thinking for a moment, I said:

"There’s nothing I want to do in particular."

"Nothing?"

With my current situation, I didn’t even know if I could go to high school.

I had to seriously consider going straight to finding work after graduating from middle school.

"In either case, goals and dreams are annoying, and I'm lazy."

"No that’s not right!"

Chiwa hit the table with her hand that was holding onto chopsticks.

"You haven't immersed yourself into anything, so it's a waste! Even if high school activities are difficult! Aren't you passionate about anything?"

If you ask me – that would be looking at manga, anime and daydreaming about these sorts of things. Then I would casually scribble in my notebook.

But even with those things, I recently could neither muster any energy nor interest.

It was because I now understood that 'hopes」 and 'fantasies」 were completely powerless before the face of reality.

"...If it's about studies, then I want to become a doctor."

"Doctor? Why? "

"Maybe *I* can cure your body."

For me, this only was an idea that had suddenly flashed through my head.

'If I could achieve something good」— it was just like one of my 'hopes」 that weren't worth mentioning.

But——

"Oi, Chiwa?"

"You idiot..."

"W-Why are you crying? Ah?"

"Idiot... It's because of..... something you said, isn't it...? You are just some Ei-kun..."

I looked at Chiwa's streaming tears and I felt a sentiment bubbling up.

—I didn't have any hope.

I was really just a sighing, motionless, unfortunate, miserable, what-should-we-do and humiliating guy. Just looking at how kendo was taken away from Chiwa, yet she still seemed hopeful, I finally understood myself.

But, could I become better?

Someone like me, I wanted to become like Chiwa and 'hope」 again --

"I’ve decided."

I stood up vigorously.

"I decided I want to be a doctor! In high school I’ll enthusiastically work hard and become Hane High’s number one student. And then I’ll get the qualification for the Medical Examination!"

Chiwa blinked under red eyes and said:

"But, Ei-kun’s grades are almost in the lower half...?"

"I’ll do it seriously in high school! Stuff like grades and qualifications will be a piece of cake even without parents! I will definitely heal your body!"

"...Really?"

"Yeah, really! Medicine advances at lightning speed! When we grow up, medical technology will have advanced so much more than it is today... No wait, it might be even that I will make it progress!"

—The me from back then was so stupid, it can't be matched.

But I had passion.

Meaningless enthusiasm.

Useless passion.

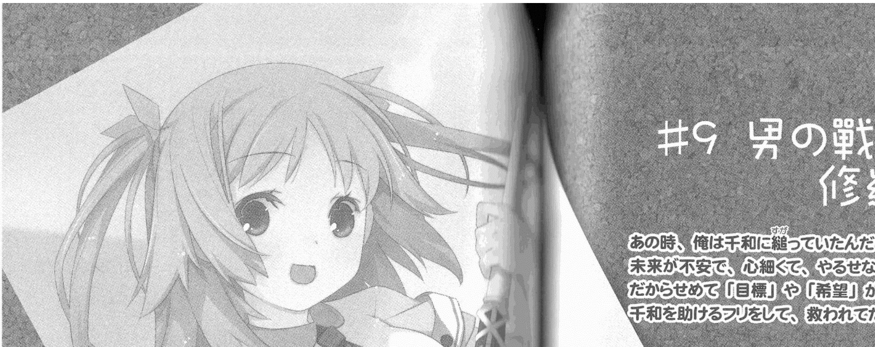
Yet, that was only a year ago.

Chiwa cried while she spoke and faced me:

"Thank you, Ei-kun."

"I will always, always wait for you."

#9: A Fight Between Men is Mayhem



#9　男の戦いは修羅場

あの時、俺は千和に縋っていたんだと思う。
未来が不安で、心細くて、やるせなくて。
だからせめて「目標」や「希望」が欲しかった。
千和を助けるフリをして、救われてたのは、俺のほう。

それなのに、千和は俺のことを信じてくれた。

だから、俺も信じなきゃいけないんだ。

千和が信じた「俺」を。

Pre-Chapter Extra

During that time, I thought I was relying on Chiwa.

The future was bleak, hopeless, disheartening.

That's why at the very least, I wanted a 'Goal', a 'Hope'.

Even though I was pretending that I wanted to help Chiwa, the one who was saved was me.

But yet, Chiwa believes in me.

That's why I also have to believe.

In the 'Me' whom Chiwa believes in.

Chapter

When I woke up in the morning, upon looking at my watch, it was around half past nine.

"Crap, I overslept..."

On a Sunday, if I don't get to the library early, the seats in the study rooms will be filled up.

I dressed up hurriedly, checked the stoves, locked the doors and left without eating. It took about 12-13 minutes to reach the library by foot. If I hurried and reached it by ten, then there should still be seats left.

However, my legs took off in a different direction by themselves.

The time was ten minutes to ten.

Ten minutes left to the appointed time for Chiwa's date.

The distance to the appointed meeting place, in front of a certain station, was around ten minutes away as well.

"Hey, hey..."

How pathetic I am.

Am I'm going to spy on her?

Even if she is my childhood friend, I can't do that right? I'm really a disgusting guy.

But: I'm so *curious.*

I really want to know no matter whaaaaaaaaaat!

"Good morning."

"Uwaaaah?!"

I jumped at the sudden voice that called out from behind.

As I was wondering who it was:

"M-Masuzu, huh?"

"Fufu. Aren't you overly surprised, Eita-kun?"

Even though it was a Sunday, Masuzu was in her school uniform (so was I), smiling.

"To be walking along this road, seems like we have the same objective, right?"

"Then, you're also here to spy on Chiwa's date?"

"The word 'spy' carries such a negative connotation to it. As the president of the 'Jien-Otsu' club, I have to watch over the gallant figure of the other members."

"Isn't that the same thing?!"

"Oh, so Eita-kun is not going to?"

"[...]"

Damn.

Just a little, just a little more.

"Once we have ascertained that they have met up, we'll leave."

"All right, I understand."

While giggling, she twined her arm around mine.

"Don't cling to me. Move away."

"Oh. Why?"

"Chiwa is neither here with us today, nor is it after-school hour, there's no need for us to keep up the pretense, right?"

"Nope. In this rural town, we never know when we might bump into students of Hane High. We definitely can't afford to relax."

With her smiling face, Masuzu said that with a hint of sarcasm and following that, I could feel the softness of her arms pressing closer.

Why is her body so soft all over, I wonder.

But now was not the time for that.

We passed a few guys who gazed at us and reached the station.

The plaza before the ticket counters, here was a standard waiting spot.

"Ooooooh..."

Chiwa was there.

Sakagami-senpai hadn't arrived yet.

With her cell phone opened up, she was standing there, unable to stay still. Her shoulders were tensed up, and even from a distance, I could sense her nervousness.

But, what was more surprising:

"Chiwa is— Chiwa is fashionably dressed?!"

Long sleeve white blouse, and a flower-patterned balloon shorts.

The collar of her blouse was attached with lace, giving off the feeling that she was wearing layered clothing, making her very girl-like. Her shorts were also of a daring length, showing off and enhancing the slenderness of her legs.

Not bad. Suits her...

"How is it? I was who coordinated it."

"You? I see that you can also do good things!"

"Yeah. It's hand me down from when I was in grade six. A perfect fit, right?"

"[...]"

As such exchanges went on, the time struck ten.

Sakagami-senpai had yet to arrive.

"What the hell's he thinking, to be late for the first date."

"...Exactly."

"During such times, isn't this the case where the guy should arrive first? He might be a good looking guy[95], but he should know the fundamentals. Did he take it lightly because it's Chiwa?"

The time further advanced and it was 10:20 a.m..

Not here yet.

"Hey, hey, what's wrong with him?"

Chiwa looked anxious and had been messing with her phone for some time. She was probably either checking whether there was a mail from Senpai or sending one to him.

"Don't tell me he stood her up? Or perhaps an accident?"

Masuzu said nothing and stayed expressionless.

The situation did not change as the time passed on, and it was finally eleven o'clock.

The number of shoppers gradually increased, and the plaza before the station was filled with people. There were many families and couples as well. The people who had been waiting at that same place for their dates had one after another left.

Only Chiwa was alone.

Standing there in isolation.

"That's enough, Chiwa. Go back! Just dump that fella!"

And— at that moment.

A loud, moronic laugh was heard in the plaza.

It was a group of high school students consisting of four guys and two girls who were dressed in anti-social fashion.

"All right, it's my win! One Yukichi-san get[96]!"

A darkly tanned, conspicuously brute-looking large man was in overly high spirits.

And beside him, was a bitter looking face —Chiwa's date, Sakagami-senpai.

"Che. Still waiting, huh? What a shameless girl."

"Isn't that great? She's cute right? I think she's fit to go out with you, though."

"Look at that outfit. She's trying to make herself look taller, huh? Looks a little like a vase though."

The two girls with crazy-colored dyed hair said.

What the hell's wrong with them?

Today is supposed to be a date, but yet, why did his friends tag along?

What are you doing, Senpai?

Quickly, quickly go and apologize to Chiwa!

"Boringzzz, though. You can go home, Chiwawa-chan."

Facing the dumbfounded Chiwa, Senpai waved his hand in a shooing manner.

"My bad. I'm really shocked. Do you really think you can go out with me?"

"There's no way that will happen, right? Know your place, 'Pitiful Chiwawa'."

The six people laughed.

"But your body is really small, huh? Are you sure you're not faking your age? Perhaps you're actually an elementary school student?"

"A middle school acquaintance of mine is a lolicon, though. Shall I introduce him to you? I think he will call you cute. In a maniac way."

"Stop that, you guys, she's really pitiful, you know, look, Chiwawa-chan is trembling. It'll be bad to make her cry, right? Gyaha!"

Chiwa wasn't trembling.

Nor was she crying.

She was merely smiling absentmindedly.

Looking at that expression, I got a deja vu—

'Seems like I can't do kendo anymore.'

"—Stop."

Masuzu caught hold of my arm as I was about to dash out.

"Let go of me, Masuzu."

"Stop. You *a•r•e • n•o•t • l•i•k•e • t•h•a•t, r•i•g•h•t*?"

"Whatever, just let go!"

"It will be fine either way, right?"

"Aaaah?!"

"We are indifferent to the many complications of love, right?"

Masuzu's expression didn't change.

It just, her blue eyes merely shone eerily.

"That man called Sakagami may have adopted the appearance of a cool sportsman in school... but this is his true nature. He two-times or three-times, and when he's tired of them, he will dump them and repeat it again and again. He's pretty famous for that among his middle school ex-classmates. However, even I would have never thought that he is garbage at this level."

"Then, you already knew this right from the start..."

So as to speak, when Chiwa mentioned Sakagami's name, Masuzu did not seem too enthusiastic.

So, it was because of this reason.

"We can use this chance to let Harusaki-san properly learn the truth. 'Love is a worthless thing'. We can use this to brainwash her[97], a believer of pure love like her to realize the futility and stupidity of love. If that happens, she might even adapt our 'anti-romance' doctrine."

"Don't mess around!"

I grabbed hold of Masuzu's collar.

But even with that, Masuzu's expression did not change.

She, how is she able to make such a cold expression?

"Then, all those club activities were just an act, a play?"

"Didn't I say it before? That it's 'Jien-Otsu'. Everything is fake. There's not a single truth."

"No way..."

That's a lie.

That’s a complete lie!

"But weren’t you happy with us? When the three of us ate snacks in the clubroom, or when we just acted plain silly – weren’t you genuinely mortified when other called the 'past life thing' a skit? Or when you heard Chiwa’s confession was successful, weren’t you overjoyed?"

The way Masuzu looked did not change, and I could not tell if she felt anything.

"Hey! just say something!"

"...There is neither a why nor how, didn’t you say it yourself before as well?"

"What?"

"I am a demon."

She spoke, and Masuzu laughed.

It was a grimace —a sad smile.

It was exactly the same 'smile' that Chiwa had just a while ago.

When faced against romance, the feeling of bitter despair.

When faced against love, the feeling of profound hopelessness.

What had really happened to this girl in the past?

Truthfully, it's probably something that my life could never be compared to.

It was darker than dark, like a cave that was cracked open, deep and profound——

"Hey, Masuzu."

"Heh?"

"Even if it’s fake, and even if it's in name only, I’m still technically your boyfriend."

"Why are you suddenly bringing this up?"

"Aren’t I your boyfriend?"

"And that, what are you talking about?"

"If then, there is one thing that I have to ask. Even if it’s just for right now, just listen to that buried part of you that has a love-struck mind."

I put my hands on Masuzu’s shoulders, stared straight into her dark pupils, and breathed deeply:

"Don’t warp yourself! Natsukawa Masuzu!"

At this moment, a crack in broke Masuzu’s perfect 'smile'.

I had always felt, since the very beginning that she had been covering her everything with a 'mask'.

"W-What are you talking about? You and I are of the same kind, aren’t we?"

"Yes. We are unquestionably similar. We’re accomplices, with distorted systems of values, with despair that no one else can understand."

"Don’t idealize words so beautifully. Why do you say something like this—?”

"Because Chiwa is an extraordinary person!"

I bellowed in anger.

"She’s so blunt, honest and rash .. Even when her dream of kendo was destroyed, there was no change in her cheerful tone. Rather, she continued on with foolish strength, that's the absolute and complete opposite of us!"

"...—is true."

Letting out a broken sound, Masuzu lowered her head.

"That child, is so dazzling.""

Like a curtain, silvery hair poured down her shoulders and hid her facial expression.

I shook off Masuzu’s arm.

"I'm going to Chiwa."

I walked away.

—Or not

Masuzu’s fingers barely grasped the end of my shirt, her body trembling.

A complete different person from before, her strength now was so fragile.

"...Ooo?"

"Don’t go."

Masuzu’s head was lowered and she looked just like a desperate child who was crying 'no, no, no, no' while shaking her head.

Exactly like a child.

I'm also just like that, I understand that well.

She was just like someone who had been abandoned without regard, without an idea of what to do. A child who could only stand motionlessly and alone.

"Masuzu..."

At that moment, I was sure of one thing:

Someone who also needed help —there was one here, too.

"Idiot—"

Then, I flicked Masuzu’s forehead.

She lifted her head with a surprised expression and with a smile I said:

"Don’t look down. Look carefully here."

"...Look at what?"

"Do I really have to say it?"

Pat~ I patted Masuzu the shoulder:

"Your 'boyfriend’s' heroism."

I ran towards the plaza.

"Woooooaaaaaaoaahhahhhaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Ah!

Ah – This feels quite refreshing!

"Woooooaaaaaahhhhhhhh – Chiwa – aaaaaahhhahahhhhhhhhh – I’m coming now!"

I didn’t feel bad to be shouting lines like a manga character.

Even though some people would call this chuunibyou, I couldn't seem to stop doing it!

"The cool guy over there, leave Chiwa alone! Uowwwwaaaaahhhh!"

I let the momentum of the running carry me and I wanted to get Sakagami-senpai’s back with a flying kick – but I failed.

When I was just about to kick him, he suddenly dodged out of the way.

Ah, if I continued assaulting so loudly, anyone would be able to notice us.

"Who are you?"

"I am that Chihuahua's childhood friend!"

Chiwa was astonished and dumbstruck, completely frozen.

"Humph - Well, Mr. childhood friend, what’s your business?"

"What? Is this part of the misunderstanding gang, or the brain-dead gang?"

The four boys that surrounded me smirked and clearly expressed the guts to start a fight. The tan one looked particularly strong and he wore a huge pile of rings on both of his hands. If he hit me, I was sure it would hurt a lot.

"Oh— oh— hit him, hit him!"

"Flatten him! Flatten him until he cries!"

When their two accompanying girls screamed out, the four boys' eyes changed.

Hmph! The entire group was a bunch of brain-dead worshipers of the Religion of Love.

There was no need to be afraid of them.

These guys were nothing.

Because I—

"Recovered!"

"Huh?"

"I recovered the memories of my past life!"

The plaza square was instantly silenced.

"My real name is Burning Fighting Fighter. Although I was stronger than the S-Class

Demons, ZZZ (Triple Z)-level, I had no interest in demonstrating my strength! As a result, I was only D-level. But when my true powers are released, I can completely wipe away the entire galaxy single-handedly!"

"Huh?"

Sakagami's group of six people simultaneously tilted their heads, puzzled.

"While the Wyverns use a 'high amount of (illumination) camouflage' to cleverly hide themselves, they cannot fool my insignia! If they've hidden themselves somewhere, imaginary pain will become true reality…!"

"Hey, what did were you talking about—?"

"Hyeahhh!"

At this moment, I used the Dragon Secret Move, 'Rare Eagle Stance'!

Don't ask why a dragon can use an eagle's stance!

"Pa! Papapah!"

Then, I continuously used 'Fate Dark Black Flame' on Sakagami.

Of course I did not forget about the sound effects!

"T-This guy is disgusting!"

"Crap?! The look in his eyes is not normal!"

Sakagami's friends looked afraid.

The surrounding spectators clustered around us, anxiously on edge.

"Hey, let's leave, okay?"

"Just ignore this kind of person. Just ignore him."

It seemed like Sakagami's group was in a hurry to walk away.

—*I* wasn't going to *let* them leave!

"Idiot! You've exposed your weakness! Completely undefended!"

I seized Sakagami's back, and used my body weight to push Sakagami over.

Straddling his stomach, I hit him! Beat him! Flattened him!

"What are you doing?!"

The tan boy used all of his force to kick my stomach. Good thing I did not eat breakfast… The fluid that rose in my throat was very acidic.

But I still didn't let go of Sakagami.

I absolutely wouldn't let go!

"Apologize!"

"Huh?"

"Apologize to Chiwa!"

"You're annoying!"

"You tricked her, and then you said all those things to her! Apologize!"

"Everyone says you’re annoying!"

A violent punch pounded my face head on.

My nose sprayed blood and dyed my shirt bright red.

"I-I’m not letting go...!"

As Sakagami tried to stand up, I silently clung to his feet.

Come on! It was time to show my ZZZ strength!

I will shed my Grade D ability and show my true strength!

"Hahaha! He’s so pitifully weak, this disgusting otaku."

My face was kicked a lot and I almost lost consciousness.

Why...

Wake Up! With the strength of the dragons! ZZZ! Sweep away the galaxy!

Only at this moment, I was very confident.

I wanted to believe.

Even though I didn’t believe the delusional entries written in the notebook.

I wanted to believe in the 'coolness' that Chiwa vainly and completely had faith in.

"Hey, what’s wrong with you? Aren’t you this Burning person? What happened to your energy from just moments ago?"

Sakagami stepped on my fingers with his shoes, and viciously squished them.

"Aaaaaaaaghhhhh..."

It hurt.

It was killing me.

My fingernails had probably already split open, and it felt like a hard object was embedded in my flesh… It hurt! It hurt, hurt, hurt, hurt! I wanted to cry – actually, I was already crying – blood and snot streamed down my face, leaving a large blot on the ground. It hurt so much! The reality of the pain was forced onto me… It looked like I was going to lose.

It was so true.

Regardless if I was a holy dragon knight, or any other character, pain was still pain!

The reality was: I couldn’t win.

It hurt.

Reality was really painful.

But—

"Yeeeooaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh, that hurts! Yaaarrrghhhh!"

Sakagami screamed like a girl.

Clutching his ankle, he rolled about on the ground.

"Damn, t-this guy. H-He actually bit me…"

I glared at Sakagami’s teary eyes and stood up.

"Watching..."

"Huh?"

"*She*[98] is watching! Wuuoooohhhhh!"

Sakagami’s three friends surrounded me with murderous eyes on their face.

Their hippie smiles from several moments ago had already disappeared.

"This is no joke, right?"

"Before the police comes, you should beat him up now."

"The police station is nearby. Is that okay?"

I stood up wiping the blood on my nose, my knees trembling. I could not hear what they were saying.

"Hahaha! Now it’s an easy win, right? Police station, police station… strange? There’s a police station near here?"

With my consciousness blurring, I nearly fell down——

"Stop it, that's enough!"

The person who shouted was Chiwa.

"Enough! If Ei-kun keeps going, he’ll die! Don’t fight with these low bastards! Anyways, I don’t even care! I-If something happened to Ei-kun, I…"

Chiwa’s teary eyes were swollen red.

She staggered and hobbled, intending to come over.

"Who’s a low bastard? You short little winter melon?!"

The tan boy flushed red and seemed ready to attack Chiwa.

"W-Wait! If you’re going to hit someone, hit me! Chiwa—"

At that moment...

Under a clear and cloudless sky, a half-rod suddenly flew in out of nowhere,

It was a long aluminum rod used to support young trees.

As if it cleaved the wind wildly, it flew to its target, into Chiwa’s hands.

"—This is!"

The pupils of Chiwa’s eyes brimmed with a burning radiance,

It really had been a long time...

This tense expression was how she looked just before kendo matches.

With both hands on the aluminum rod, she immediately shifted into a high stance.

"——Meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeen[99]!"

With a beautiful explosive motion, she struck the tan boy’s forehead.

Without even the time to cry out, he collapsed backwards to the ground, motionless.

"That bitch!"

The other two boys shouted in near unison as they flung their fists at Chiwa, but missed. Chiwa wove in between the two males, swiftly and gracefully dodging their moves. The surrounding crowd cheered, “Wow!”

"Dora! Dorara!"

Chanting like in the previously practiced 'Dorarara ~Live Performance Event', Chiwa dodged sideways and struck with lightning speed the two boys’ midsections! I thought they would cry out 'Wuahhh', but instead they clutched their abdomens and fell to their knees.

Instant victory.

"...Haha."

Suddenly exhausted of strength, I fell sprawled out on the stone floor.

—*Chiwa really* is *strong.*

Chiwa put down the shinai, and approached Sakagami.

"Yieeieh!"

Sakagami dragged himself on the ground, looking like a cockroach crawling away to escape… his handsome image was ruined.

She faced Sakagami—

"Senpai, I apologize!"

Chiwa forcibly bowed, her salute formal and beautiful like a kendo bow.

"To be honest, I also lied to you."

"Huh?"

"I actually don’t even like you one bit. Rather, because I got in a quarrel with my incomparably stupid childhood friend, I decided to find a boyfriend. Thus, I randomly picked a target. I’m sorry."

After she said this, Chiwa bowed again.

"Can you forget about everything that happened today?"

"Ah! I’ve had enough! I don't want anything to do with you and I never want to have any relationship with you ever again!"

Sakagami stood up, helped by the shoulders of the two girls and nodded bitterly.

The surrounding crowd also took the opportunity to disperse and no one remained to watch us. They must have been quite shocked by us.

Sakagami’s group also snuck into the midst of the crowd, dejectedly.

"Your face looks miserable."

Chiwa examined my face while I was sprawled on my back.

"The nosebleed keeps running. Ei-kun, do you have some tissues?"

"...Forgot to bring some."

"It can't be helped..."

Chiwa knelt down on the ground and lifted my head. She placed it on her lap —the so-called 'Lap Pillow', Saeko-san once said: 'A lap pillow from a childhood friend is simply the best', or something like that.

"I-I have to say something..."

"Huh?"

"From earlier, that 'battle with the enemies of our past lives' part, I only did it out of habit. It's not like I did it for you."

"...Ei-kun really is a tsundere[100]. Tsundere Childhood friends are usually female, right?"

"Who cares? Shut up."

"OK, OK. Does it hurt?"

She used some tissues to wipe some blood from my nose.

"It still throbbing with pain deep inside my nose."

"Well, should I show you my panties? Maybe you’ll feel better?"

My nosebleed erupted again. *Aren’t you making me worse?*

"W-W-Who would want to see your p-p-p-panties?!"

"Hmph, don’t be so grudging. It doesn’t matter."

Hateful person, you dare to mock me!

I looked around and saw the aluminum rod rolling on the ground.

The person who originally threw this pipe, was it really her—?

I already couldn’t see the silhouette of that person anymore.

"Oh, Ei-kun."

"What?"

"Earlier when you stated loudly filled with anger, right? You said, '*She*[101] is watching'!"

Guhuh?!

"D-D-Did I-I-I say s-something like that? I don’t remember."

"Yes, you definitely said it. ~~My ears heard it very clearly~~."

This tone of voice was really annoying to the max[102].

Chiwa looked all around on one side, then everywhere nearby, and said:

"Natsukawa didn’t come today?"

"Aah? Um, I think... she didn’t come."

When I finished saying this, Chiwa’s eyes immediately sparkled with brilliant joy.

"Then... when you said, '*her*, that was me?"

This time my nosebleed really sprayed.

"H-H-H-H-How is that even possibllllle…?"

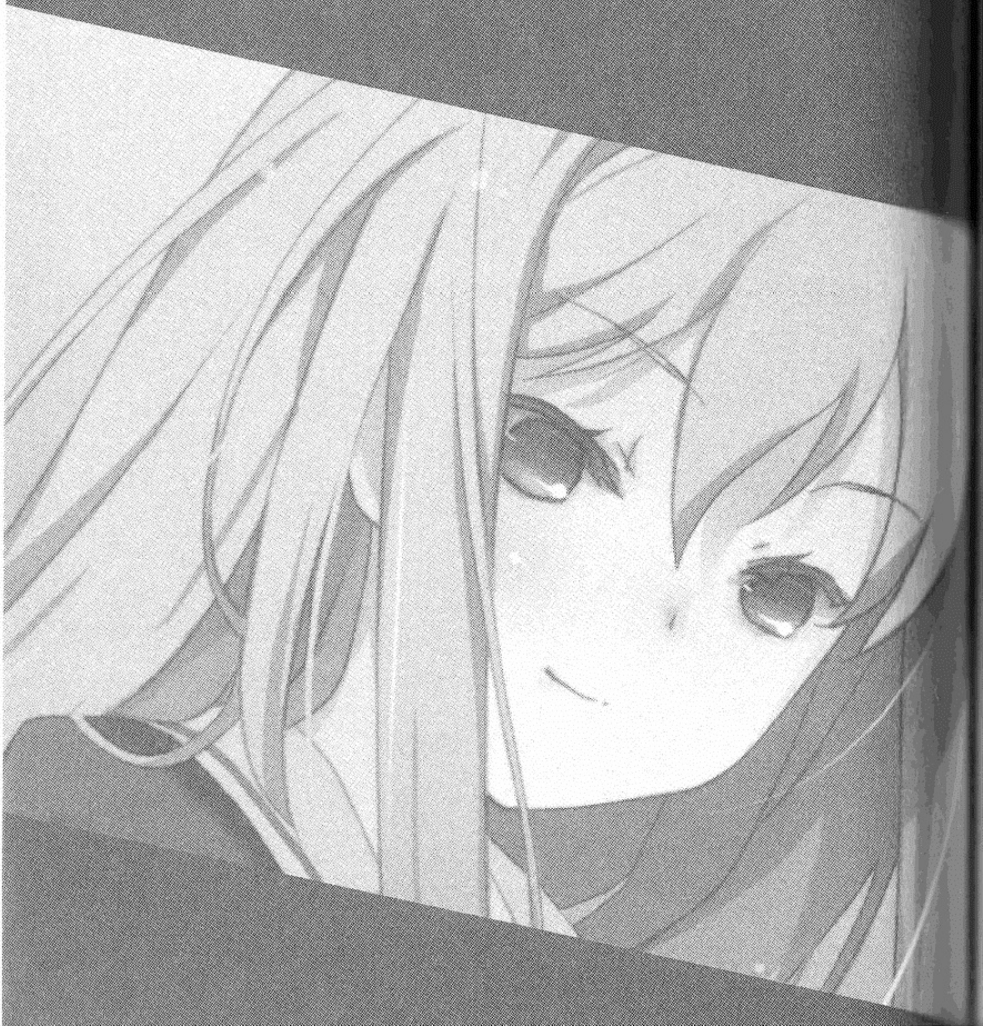
My blood continued to flow, and my consciously gradually blurred…

"Hey! –Ei-kun, Ei-kun! Stay awake! Wake up a little!"

Chiwa’s voice seemed to grow distant. It really… was a relaxing ending.

#10: The First XXX[103] is Mayhem

#10　初めての×××で修羅場



"How impressive, Eita finally showed his great efforts."

Kaoru used these words to sum up yesterday's commotion.

I was eating a bento packed full with leftovers from yesterday’s dinner, and Kaoru chewed on a recently bought sweetened bun from the school canteen.

This lunch break was as peaceful as it always used to be.

The only difference was probably the blood that dried deep inside my nose, which left a rather stiff feeling. Also, band-aid wrapped around my fingers, so it was hard to use chopsticks.

"Chihuahua-chan is very happy, right?"

"No, I scared her witless."

Afterwards, Chiwa had given me a huge serving of complaints.

'Ah, Eita’s fighting is too weak and too reckless.'

'Ah, when Eita doesn’t have me next to him, he’s helpless.'

It was very unreasonable. Why did I have to be scolded when I was the one who went to help her?

"Oh, but she was glad about one thing."

"What?"

"That is, 'the super stupid Ei-kun from middle school came back.'”

That point was actually unfair.

I only acted like that because I had no other method planned! That was why I did that! It was an extremely rational decision and I definitely did not return to my past self.

Nevertheless...

"Hey, Kaoru."

"Hmm?"

"When I was in middle school, was I really that much of an idiot?"

"[...] [...] ...I don’t... think so?"

"Then why were you silent for so long?"

"Ah, the weather is so nice. I wonder if it'll stay like this until summer?"

"W-Wait! If you wanted to say something, please say it out loud!"

However, Kaoru refused to make eye contact with me and silently looked towards the empty seat next to mine.

"Natsukawa-san is absent today."

"...Ka-Kaoru...?"

I-I was struck!

"You didn’t get in touch with her?"

"No, I didn’t contact her."

It was probably more accurate for me to say there was 'no way' for me to do so.

Because I did neither know her cell phone number nor her email.

"Could it be that Natsukawa-san is really angry?"

"Angry? Why?"

"Think about it. Eita threw away his own girlfriend, and ran off to be some other girl’s Prince Charming?"

"Who’s a Prince Charming?"

I remembered from before, 'Prince who originates from Kobe came in his ride'.

Well, if it was Chiwa, she could even eat raw horse-meat sashimi happily.

"In short, now you're sure to give Natsukawa-san some sort of explanation, aren't you?."

"Well..."

How should I say it?

Technically, we aren’t really in a relationship.

No… wait.

That person said something like that before.

—'Don’t be so kind with other girls right in front of me.'

shiver! I felt a chill.

The memory of her sweet breathing was awakened in my brain…

What an unusual feeling.

"Do you know where her house is?"

"I don’t. It looks like it's in the same direction as my house."

"After school, find a teacher and ask him about it, *Eita-kun*[104]."

"Yeah..."

It'll be like that.

Chiwa said that she would be eating with her family, so she is going home first.

I have something to ask Masuzu, too.

Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self, also known as 'Jien-Otsu'.

...What is going to be happen to our club after this?

◆

According to the map the instructor drew, I needed to head southwest from Hane River, in the direction of the highway. After walking a short distance, I would see Masuzu’s house.

This place was not a small distance from my house.

In fact, Masuzu must have regularly taken a long detour to walk home with me.

Was she accommodating me?

Normally, it would have been her style to make me walk the long detour…

I thought about this as I walked on the riverside.

"I will hug youuuuuuu... veeeeery tight! That will be your punishment, *OK*!"

"Waah!"

I suddenly felt a tight embrace from behind me.

The perfume I was so familiar with caused my nose to itch.

It was Natsukawa Masuzu.

"W-Why are you acting just the same as yesterday?!"

"This is not merely 'behavior', it has some JoJo *neta*[105] as a bonus. By the way, these are some lines from Wired Beck in part two."

"Only you would remember the lines of such a minor vampire grunt[106]!"

Even if you came here specifically to bicker with me...

Masuzu-san’s is leaning on me with that*, I can certainly feel how she is hugging meeeeee... veeeeery tight*[107]*!*

Bendi—

Really Bending!

...It feels so wonderful ...

"You look quite healthy."

"Yes, *thanks to you*."

It was completely just like the typical Masuzu.

...Not good.

Right now, I feel like I'm all over the place.

"In any case: Why are you walking around here? Could it be that your house is close here?"

"Eh? Um, this, ah, I'm going to Naruse to buy reference books."

A makeshift lie on the spot.

Naruse was a nearby bookstore affiliated with Hane High School. It had a range of reference books, along with many books that could only be bought there.

Finals were almost here, so this excuse should not have been strange…

"I see, you’re always so studious."

Masuzu casually nodded.

My heart relieved, I said:

"Yesterday, the person who threw that aluminum rod, it was you."

"[...]"

"Thank you, it was a great help."

"...Nah, it was merely something a 'girlfriend' would do."

Masuzu’s words were steady and expressionless, giving no hints for others to detect her true feelings.

It didn’t even seem like she was angry.

"Right, why didn’t you come to school today?"

"That. My very own sickness, it's just a self performance."

"In other words, feigned illness?"

"No, it was a club activity."

Masuzu said decisively:

"Don’t you think sick people score high? Girls who suffer from incurable diseases, who stare out from ward windows gazing the tree branches, counting the number of leaves… Even though it’s old-fashioned, it’s very attractive to gentlemen, don’t you think?"

"What's with these delusions...?"

No, isn't that also...

"Then, that means that we'll continue with the Jien-Otsu activities?"

"That's the plan."

An immediate reply.

"We won't continue with the idea for Harusaki-san's sake that we originally started the club just—— I thought about it, and there was no other activity that was better at trampling love! For Eita-kun and me who are anti-romance, to teach the means of becoming popular to those who believe in romantic love, wouldn't that be a thrilling tale?"

"I see."

Even though I thought her enthusiasm was a little dark, it wasn’t like I couldn’t understand her.

"To undo Harusaki-san's brainwashing, we'll merely need ten minutes."

"What? You haven’t given up?!"

"...Well, I'm warped anyway."

Masuzu pouted.

"W-What? You’re still hung up on yesterday’s events?"

"Dunno?"

pui, her face turned around.

...How cute. Even if it's just Masuzu.

I resisted the temptation to laugh and said:

"Well, that’s fine too. I’m ultimately anti-love, just like you. Since this is the case, I will accompany you and stop Chiwa from falling into runaway love."

"But—"

Masuzu’s voice dropped a tone, and her eyelashes lowered.

"I don’t know if Harusaki-san... will come to the club again."

Oh.

I never thought Masuzu would turn out to be so timid!

"She *will* come."

To thank her for all of her rare emotional expressions I spoke with certainty:

"Since she was rejected by Sakagami-sempai, she’s still far from 'becoming popular'.”

"I see..."

"I’ve said it before, once she settles on a goal, the girl would never give up halfway."

Fuh, then Masuzu revealed a lonely smile.

"You seem to understand *everything* about Harusaki-san."

"*That's being childhood friends*."

"......Huuun."

Masuzu’s voice suddenly shrank.

Did I say something to make her angry?

I didn’t expect her to suddenly fall onto me.

"————!"

Moist lips covered my mouth.

Masuzu’s long eyelashes hovered in front of me.

Her silvery hair that touched my cheeks made me shiver.

The tiny breath from her nose also made me feel ticklish.

The body heat, from being held in her arms from before couldn't possibly compare to *this*. So hot.

Then her lips slowly pulled away from me.

Her body heat disappeared.

The aroma left.

"W-W-W-W-Wha————?!"

Her cheeks contracted a helplessly intoxicated color, and Masuzu began to brush her tousled hair.

"So... did you kiss Harusaki-san, yet?"

"Ha-Haaa?"

"Probably not."

"O-Of course not!"

"Well, then please remember this:

Your first wasn't Harusaki-san! It was me, Natsukawa Masuzu."

"[...]"

What should I say? I was already speechless.

Just what type of 'I hate to lose' guy is she?

"That..."

Bashfully, Masuzu shyly toyed with her skirt, sometimes clutching it and sometimes letting go.

"What? Any impressions?"

Even if you ask me about my thoughts, I also...

"Ah, how to say it… it pretty much fits your audaciousness."

"...If it is about that, it isn't what I'm asking about."

I didn't know why, but Masuzu's shoulders drooped, very disappointed.

What is with this girl?

Even though it has been just today, isn't that a love-struck mind[108]?

"Anyway, are you fine with it?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"No, I mean... Are you happy because I was the one you kissed?"

When I had finished speaking, I could see Masuzu's face blush.

"For real, you are so dense."

"Eh?"

"...It won't do, unless it's with *you*."

"Eeee?!"

Hey.

Hey-Hey!

If you say something to that extent, even I can realize it!

It's not about Fakes, but for real she really li—

"That now was one of the most famous scenes in part one, 'Dio forcibly steals a kiss from Erina.' (parody version) Thus, the target must also be a JoJo fan like me to understand."

"So just now it was for the sake of imitating JoJo?"

Masuzu gave a big sigh, and said:

"But Eita-kun, I thought you would realize it right away."

"So the dense part was about that!"

"Aaaa, you're making me explain my very own source material, it's kinda embarrassing."

"So that's why you blushed? The riddle makes sense now!"

A girl that would have her first kiss with her boyfriend for the sake of a fulfilling some 'JoJo neta'.

How intoxicating! Sublime!

"What an extreme JoJoJoJo obsessed woman you are!"

"Thank you, thank you for praising me ———Anyways, back to the main topic, Eita-kun."

"What?"

Masuzu pointed at a puddle in the water ditch which was filled with gravel and said:

"Come on, hurry up and use some muddy water to rinse your mouth."

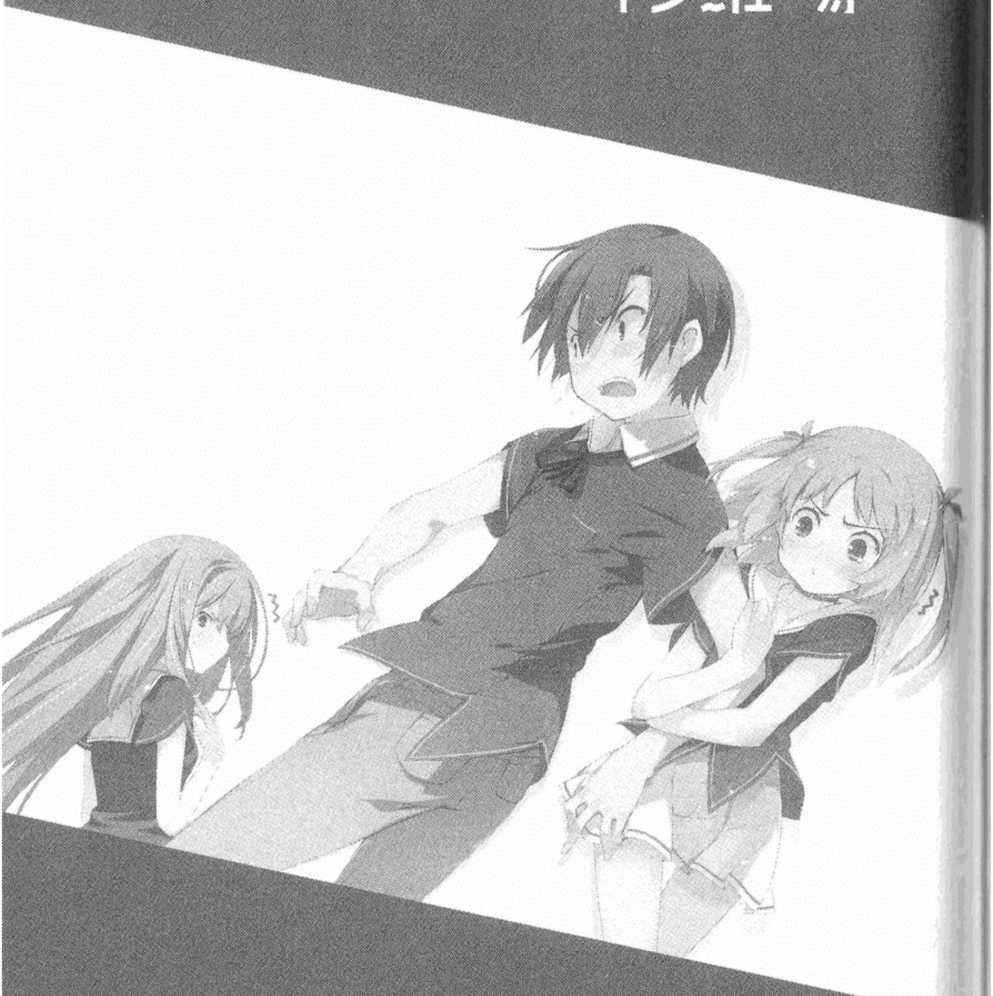
"Like if I could be faithful to the story to that extent—!"

Even though I gave out such a retort, Masuzu let out a happy giggling laughter.

Her cheeks, for some reason, were still red.

#11: It's the Epilogue; yet, it's Merciless Mayhem

＃11 エピローグなのに容赦なく修羅場



All in all, in either cases—

The next day, Masuzu came to school like nothing had happened.

After school, Chiwa also came to the clubroom like nothing had happened.

And just as it did in the past, the 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self' recommenced club activities.

"Well, in short, Sakagami-senpai and I weren't fit for each other."

Chiwa chewed on mince cutlet bread while she readily summarized the romance with the cool guy.

"But, I won't give up! Because I want to become popular to the point that even Ei-kun will cry enough to fill an ocean."

Yeah right, Chiwa. When the time comes, I will cry tears of joy.

"That's the spirit, our high school life has barely just begun, our true battle will start from now on."

Masuzu, since we just re-started the club activities, please don't immediately raise another bad flag!

Thus, even though it was almost time for final exams, our Jien-Otsu club decided to try some new combat tactics.

'Girls who can cook are seriously cute' became the new theme of strategy.

This combat strategy was exactly what the literal meaning described, but Chiwa simply could not cook.

"Masuzu, can you actually cook?"

"Me? I absolutely cannot."

'Just what are you trying to do', Masuzu's eyes told me as she stared at me.

"If you can't, it doesn't matter as long as you pretend that you can."

"...This pattern again...?"

"It'll be fine if Eita-kun just eagerly eats the bentos we make. Tomorrow at lunch, just eat in the classroom in front of everyone and emphatically praise our cooking. Even though it may not be edible… you'll just have to endure it. It's about endurance."

thunk! Chiwa patted her chest and said:

"No problem, Ei-kun! I'll work hard so my food won't be life-threatening!"

"You guys never even intended to have me taste a delicious meal!"

I banged the table with great force.

"No, I absolutely won't eat it! It's nearly final exams, and I don't want to upset my stomach!"

"So, ah, what a shame."

Masuzu turned her head, *phuu*~ and said with a sigh:

"Changing the topic, my computer's been acting strange recently. The hard disk often makes weird noises."

"Oh? Well then you should go get it fixed soon."

"The sounds it makes are really quite strange. It's a *'The Secret of the Note, Secret will be Expose-, Expose-, Exposed—♪'* kind of noise."

"Ah, well that means it's broken beyond repair… —wahh— I think I've changed my mind, I want to eat— I mean I'm so looking forward to eat Masuzu-san's and Chihuahua-chan's o-bentoooooooos![109]"

◆

The next day at lunch—

Originally, this was going to cruelly deprive the relaxing time Kaoru and I had together.

"Well, then today I'll go to eat in the student cafeteria."

"S-Sorry Kaoru!"

Please don't leave...

Please don't leave me here all by myself!

"Then, why don't you try some of my o-bento? Give it a try, Eita-kun."

"I'll go first! These type of things are supposed to be left to the ones that have the longest relationship, right?"

I sat sandwiched between the two of them. They were so close to me, that it was difficult to move my chopsticks.

"For a mere childhood friend, you are actually quite shameless. For cases such as those, doesn't the girlfriend get the highest priority?"

"Hmph. You barely started dating a few weeks ago. Do you really think that can win over our nine years together?"

Really, it doesn't matter how you look at it, this seems to be the chapter of 'Kidou Eita has reached popularity'.

As a matter of fact, since some time ago, the expression of all the classmates – especially that of the boys – were filled with incomparable jealously. That said, Yamamoto-kun, what is that straw doll supposed to be for? Maybe that 'Give me a strand of your hair' that you once said was just for that sole purpose?

Wrong...

Certainly Wroooooong!

"Well then, rather, why won't we have Eita-kun pick one?"

"All expectations on me?!"

The two of them opened the lids of their bentos at the same time.

Instantly, a horrible stench flowed all around me.

That clearly wasn't the color of something you put in your mouth.

This actually seemed to be taken from a guro[110] video and was sufficient to trigger a mental breakdown. The thought of it caused my appetite to be blown away!

Yes, they actually exceeded my expectations.

"Uh, Chiwa..."

"What, Ei-kun?"

"What is this black charcoal-like object? Is it coal?"

I am not some steam engine train.

"This is Chiwa-chan's meaty meatball specialty! It's made by wrapping up fried streaky pork! It looks good, doesn't it?"

Well, if only it weren't charred like this!

"Uh, Masuzu......"

"What is it, Eita-kun?"

"This— What is this pile of brown slime in the bento box? Is it edible?"

"Maybe?"

Masuzu gracefully tilted her head.

"To be honest I don't remember anything that happened during that time…"

"You lost your memory when you cooked?"

Besides, how can you make me to eat this stuff?

"But it'll be fine , I'm sure it'll be delicious."

"There is no foundations for that claim! Then, just eat some first!"

Thereupon, without speaking a word Masuzu immediately looked away.

...T-This woman...

"Oh, hurry up and eat —I'd like to hear your thoughts? Okay?"

Chiwa's eyes began to glow with excitement.

"This is the meal in which I poured my whole heart, please taste it thoroughly."

Masuzu smiled brilliantly.

I had already begun to regret the words I said to Masuzu the day before yesterday.

I actually said: 'I'll help you stop Chiwa from leaving'.

How long was this going to go?

When were you guys going to stop?!

I began to hear the boys of the class grumbling in resentment. 'Little shit... ', 'Die, die right now! ', 'Why is that kind of guy popular? ', 'Pan – Pang -Pang' . This was the sound of Yamamoto-kun banging nails on the straw doll. 'It can't be that he is playing them both!?', 'Even if it's Chihuahua, let me have her!', 'Better yet, just change places with me!'

—Sure, let's change.

That is, if you're willing to cook for Chiwa every night.

If you think you resist Masuzu's wicked tongue and JoJo reference exchanges.

Whenever you want it, let's change.

"...Hey, Chiwa."

I looked far away:

"The so-called popularity... is it possible that it's not as great as you think...?"

"Ei-kun is suddenly acting like if he is so cool!"

"Ara, since he's my boyfriend, of course he's cool."

Mugyu! Masuzu hugged my left arm.

"No way! H-e i-s m-y childhood friend!"

Chiwa refused to admit defeat and pulled my right arm.

"Why don't you give up?"

"Why don't *you* give up?"

ゴゴゴゴゴゴ[111]...

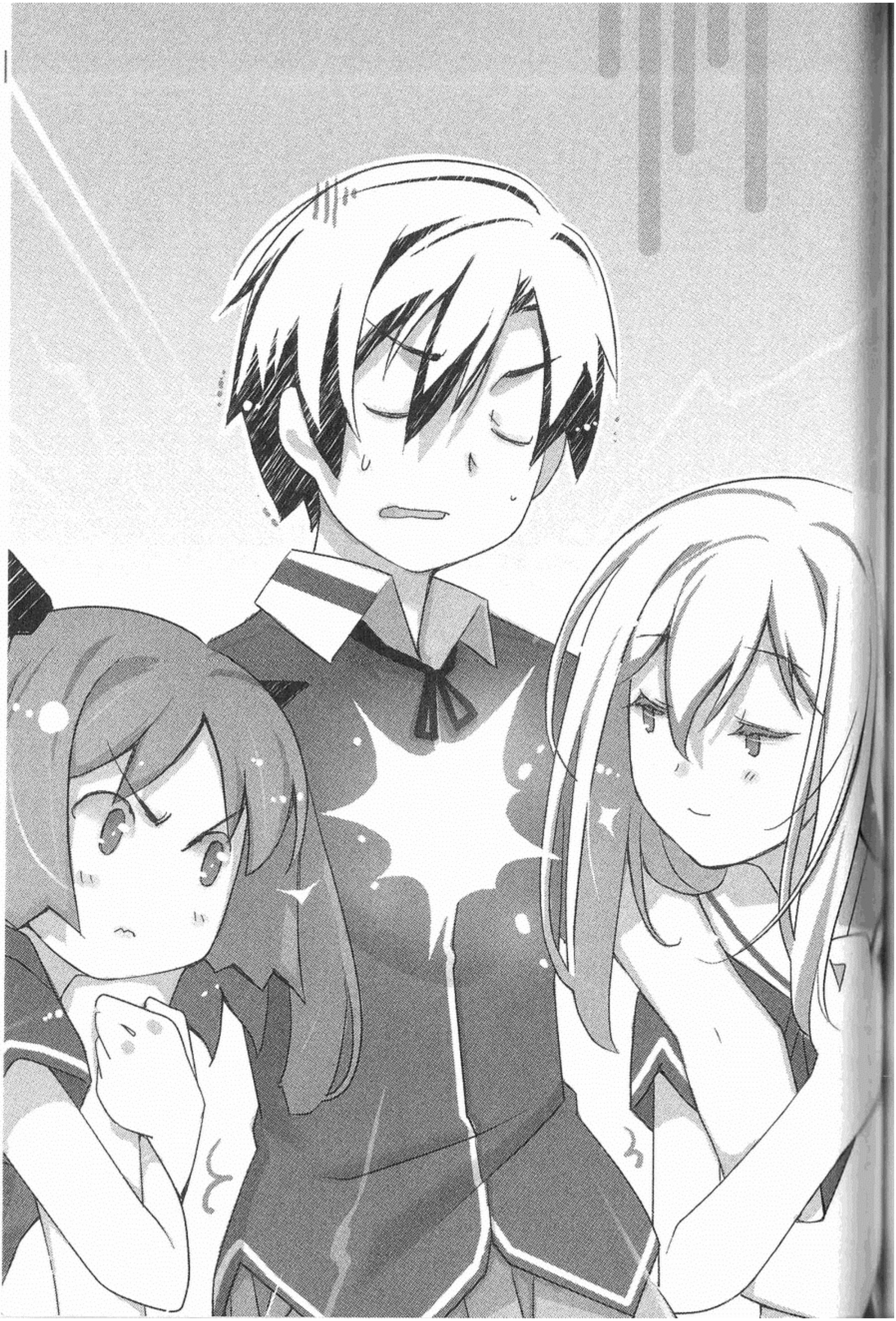
With this JoJoJoJo like background sound effect, the two of them glared at each other.

The male students, also filled with incredible hatred, glared at me.

I don't want it...

This type of high school life, I don't want it!

I'm stuck in the carnage between my girlfriend and my childhood friend[112]*!*



Afterword

A strong "childhood friend."

In ancient and modern romantic comedies, this formula was particularly welcomed. In this case, the childhood friend symbolizes the “ordinary, everyday life.” When a beautiful maiden possessing a “secret” suddenly appears, the protagonist’s everyday life is wrecked apart. Although the childhood friend is often involved in the incidents, she is essentially excluded from the inside of the circle. When the protagonist is toyed around by the enigmatic maiden, the childhood friend is still strong enough to resolutely wait for the main character to eventually return.

-- Originally, this was not an "ideal" romantic comedy.

Rather, it is a "tremendously ideal" love comedy.

The premise of “having a girlfriend” is impossible.

Like all romantic comedies, particularly in the field of light novels, the protagonist almost never has a girlfriend. This is of course, because if there had been a girlfriend, the romantic comedy would have been nonexistent. The story would not be able to expand, and most likely become: “although the heroine loved him, the protagonist was very slow and never noticed” kind of story. Repeatedly, the two would sometimes grow closer, but sometimes, they would also miss the circumstances.

-- Originally, this wasn’t an "orthodox" romantic comedy.

But rather, it was an “exceptionally orthodox” romantic comedy.

Tremendously ideal.

Exceptionally orthodox.

Why is the title, “My girlfriend and childhood friend ‘’’desperate’’' Mayhem? It is based on the above reasons.

While I was working on the next issue of my debut work (踊る星降るレネシクル), I was preparing for a new series – in this kind of predicament, it was only completed thanks to everyone from both 责编サト, and GA Bunko, along with the keen criticism of M·T-sensei, and the illustrator, LLO-sensei. I can't thank you enough for all your kindness you have given to my work.

Well, the story comes to stop here.

To all the readers, thank you for accompanying me this entire way up until now.

Translator notes and references

1. ↑ **Pre-Chapter**: This section explains the proverb: 両手に花. See here for Daijisen.
2. ↑ **Shinai**: Bamboosword used in Kendo. [1]
3. ↑ **Kendo**: Japanese "martial arts" but rather treated and popular as a sport, in which you fight with bamboswords. [2]
4. ↑ Japanese high schools last three years from 10th to 12th grade.
5. ↑ **Shoujo Manga**: Manga with girls as target-group. [3]
6. ↑ **Ei-kun**: "Ei" is pronounced like the "A" in "Area".
7. ↑ **Doppyun Serenade**: If you really want to know the actual reference, google "どっぴゅんセレナーデ". It may be not safe for work. You have been warned.
8. ↑ **Chiwawa**: Pun on her looking like the dog. [4]'
9. ↑ **Tosa**: Another pun on her being like the dog. [5]
10. ↑ **Opanchu**: Basically a panty-shot.
11. ↑ **Shounen Manga**: A manga with boys as target-group. [6]
12. ↑ **Half-Price Bento**: This is actually a reference to "Ben-To Ben-To". Ben-To
13. ↑ **Silly girl**: Raw-Text: "Ahonoko". This is a character trait similar to "yandere" or the like, used to define girls that are acting silly.
14. ↑ "Hakata Salt" commercials are sung syllable by syllable [7]
15. ↑ The kanji of waist 腰 includes the character 要 which can mean "important point" or "necessary".
16. ↑ **Ara, ara**: A phrase older/mature women use in Japan, basically: "My, my.".
17. ↑ In the original, "kyoudai (兄妹)" hinted at Eita as the older and Chiwa as the younger sibling; Eita mentioned it in a different composition (姉弟) which hints vice-versa.
18. ↑ He uses the proper kanji of "logical" (合理的判断) , Chiwa doesn't know it and falls short on the pronunciation "goriteki?".
19. ↑ She uses "aishiteru" (愛してる) here, which is the most serious declaration of love.
20. ↑ The actual term here is "otome game" or "otoge".
21. ↑ Chiwa switched to a childlike tone here.
22. ↑ **Popucute**: Merging of "popular" and "cute".
23. ↑ The original uses "riajuu", meaning "people that are well accomplished in their social life".
24. ↑ **Komainu**: A lion-like statue that guards the entrance or the inner shrine of many

Japanese Shinto shrines. [8]

25. ↑ **Yareyare**: Traditional Japanese sigh, can mean many things, but in this case it's probably a tedious sigh at Eita's denseness.
26. ↑ This is a fourth wall joke, where Masuzu takes the roll of the narrator and Eita's latter "butting in".
27. ↑ **Tsukkomi**: Tsukkomi is a part of "manzai" or stand-up comedy, where one acts the part of the fool (boke) and the tsukkomi corrects him. [9]
28. ↑ Called Fundoshi. [10]
29. ↑ Sins are called "Ore no Karma" here, probably a pun of "Ore no Cosmos" of Kurumada's work.
30. ↑ From here on in the series referred to as "Note".
31. ↑ Calling each other by their first names without honorifics is a symbol of being *very* close in Japan.
32. ↑ **Eighth-Grade Syndrome**: Kids being in a phase where they think to live in a dark world or similar delusions. Often happening around the 8th grade.
33. ↑ **Annihilate**: It's a wordplay, he wrote "destroy" (滅) on one hand and "murder" (殺) on the other, but if joined together as 滅殺 they become "annihilate".
34. ↑ Original name: "Magure Keiji Dontsuu" (まぐれ刑事鈍痛派)
35. ↑ Shortening of above mentioned TV show.
36. ↑ **Nya**: Cat sound, Japanese style.
37. ↑ She technically uses "breakwater" (防波堤) here.
38. ↑ Niko or "nico" is a smile "sound effect", nikori means "smile".
39. ↑ The Japanese use the term "Bitch" different than Americans. For Bitch they mean girls that have a pretty time getting along with the opposite gender and look pretty fashionable. In other words, it's closer to the English term "Slut".
40. ↑ Masuzu uses here 作る, a very wide term, she probably used it as "to prepare one", and Eita played with the meaning of the world
41. ↑ Barking SFX.
42. ↑ Biting SFX.
43. ↑ Brush, ink, paper and inkwell
44. ↑ He's mockingly phrasing this as a pick-up line
45. ↑ As it is japanese calligraphy, it uses "Mizukara wo Enshutsu-suru Otome no Kai" (自らを演出する乙女の会).
46. ↑ If we take the first kanji characters from the club name, we get [自演乙] or "jien otsu", which is a term that originated from 2ch and happens to be the abbreviation of something else (自作自演おつかれさま) or Jisakujien Otsukaresama, literally meaning: "Samefag". [11]
47. ↑ In Kanji: 糸谷.
48. ↑ Kaoru's nickname for Chiwa.

49. ↑ **Take Down**: オトス, as in "taking down a target".
50. ↑ Written in English.
51. ↑ Written in English.
52. ↑ Kool (Cool) & Hat (Hot) are meant as typos.
53. ↑ In Kendo, you have to yell the body part you are attacking, here she is referencing that the mask (men) gets hit.
54. ↑ **Air Guitar**: Pretending to play guitar, without holding one in one's hands.
55. ↑ These are J-Pop artists. "Johnny" is probably Johnny Kitagawa and "AK" Akemi Krivit.
56. ↑ Chiwa is using the Japanese term for singer (歌手) , Masuzu corrects her with the English one.
57. ↑ Creator of Jojo.
58. ↑ **Peking Man**: A fossil, believed to be among the first evolutionary stages of the human being.
59. ↑ By "Peking Man" Chiwa didn't understand that she was being called primitive, she merely understood that she was being called "someone from Peking".
60. ↑ In Kanji: 赤野メイ.
61. ↑ Riajuu (successful in social life) is used.
62. ↑ In Kanji: 青葉 さつき.
63. ↑ The "Ao" in "Aoba" is from "green" (or blue) and the "Aka" in "Akano" from "red"
64. ↑ Chiwa correctly memorized the "names", but her pronunciation of them was strange (written in hiragana).
65. ↑ Funnels is a type of remote / mind controlled weapon of Gundam, the characters that can use these are labeled as "NEW TYPES". Eita's pun strikes twice, first that Chiwa calls herself "Old Type" and second is that in katakana the "Fun" of "Funnels" is the same as "Fan", thus he implies that she isn't a good fan
66. ↑ This is Josuke Higashikata (lead of Jojo's Part IV) multi-punch battle cry.
67. ↑ Again, wrong pronunciation.
68. ↑ A very characteristic type of laugh, interpreted as mischievous.
69. ↑ "Live" is spelled in katakana ("raibu") here and is intended to be a play on words by adding Josuke's kiai from "JoJo".
70. ↑ Originally: Pantsu (ぱんつ).
71. ↑ Again "shooting down a target" (オトス) is used.
72. ↑ Meaning: She looks docile.
73. ↑ Returnee from abroad.
74. ↑ Original: 君が泣くまで殴るのをやめない , a quote from Jonathan in part 1, when he fights Dio with in order to restore Erina's honor (chapter 4).
75. ↑ She uses "Nyani , Nyanda for Nani & Nanda , which are all interrogative

forms.

76. ↑ The word used here is "settei" (設定), which actually is similar to setting, but more elaborated.
77. ↑ Original: 汲み取り式トイレ. Common norm in the 50s. You basically can't sit on them and you are better off not taking a deep breath near them, and are pretty uncomfortable.
78. ↑ Original: 異能•異界の者. Possibly a reference.
79. ↑ Masuzu uses this as Eita’s nickname.
80. ↑ "Burning Fighting Fighter" is only the pronunciation. The meaning is "Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn" (暁の聖竜騎士).
81. ↑ "De Gozaru" is a form of "to be" in polite language. It's usually out of use and thus associated with characters from ancient Japan, such as Ninja or Samurai.
82. ↑ Original: 宿命の黒い黒炎, the meaning is pretty close in both languages.
83. ↑ Possibly a reference to "Dragon Ball".
84. ↑ He should have used "optical camouflage" (迷彩光学) but instead used (高額迷彩), meaning "large sum of money".
85. ↑ Masuzu is using "Makkuro" (真っ黒), since the flame is twice as dark, Masuzu is using a tone stronger than black to describe it.
86. ↑ Written in English.
87. ↑ Written in English.
88. ↑ Eita used the kanji of hundred days, but the reading of thousand days with a typo.
89. ↑ This comes from the animated TV version of the "Evangelion" ending.
90. ↑ Manga publishing terms.
91. ↑ It's an anime character from Kiteretsu Encyclopedia, who finishes his sentences with "~nari". The creator of korosuke is Fujiko F Fujio, from the Doraemon fame, and in his museum there are a bunch of exclusive busses, who are are all plastered with images of korosuke, which probably is the source of Masuzu's current prank.
92. ↑ One of the many selling points of Kobe is the "Kobe beef"
93. ↑ These lines are from a "Dragon Ball Z" opening.
94. ↑ Chiwa uses "nyani ka" instead of "nani ka".
95. ↑ Ikemen is used, meaning "cool guy".
96. ↑ **Get**: Ending with the word "get" in colloquial speech is pokemon-like. Also, he calls the 10000 yen bill "Yukichi-san", it's the name of the man on the bill.
97. ↑ Masuzu refers to Chiwa as "kanojo" (彼女) , in this case "her", this is important for later.
98. ↑ He uses "kanojo" (彼女) here, which can either mean "girlfriend" or "her" depending on the context. Remember how he and Masuzu have been calling

Chiwa "kanojo" since a while ago? It's to produce that subtlety that you can read it as either Masuzu (the girlfriend) or Chiwa (the "her" who's present in the scene).

99. ↑ Men = Kendo strike to the head.
100. ↑ **Tsundere**: Tsundere is a character type which acts non caring on the outside, but is actually attentive or loving on the inside.
101. ↑ Refer to above mentioned "kanojo" hint.
102. ↑ Max is written in English.
103. ↑ XXX usually implies a "kiss" in Japanese.
104. ↑ When Kaoru scolds Eita in the name of either Masuzu or Chiwa, he addresses him in the same way that either Chiwa or Masuzu would respectively.
105. ↑ Neta (ネタ) is like, "source material", "reference", it can change depending on the context and is used a lot, so I left it as it is
106. ↑ Part 2 of JoJo has over 100 vampires. Wired Beck barely lasts like 10 pages from introduction to demise. Eita is wrong, though, as his peculiar demeanor actually made him pretty popular among fans.
107. ↑ he is also using Wired Beck's line here, but not a carbon copy of it like Masuzu did.
108. ↑ Original: 恋愛脳.
109. ↑ "O" is added prior to certain words to add more importance to them.
110. ↑ Short for "grotesque".
111. ↑ "gogogogo" is the sound effect of "tension rising" or "menacing atmosphere" , it's actually pretty commonly used in JoJo, to the point where it's almost characteristic.
112. ↑ He is using the light-novel title.

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